

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

Adrian Grama

LABORING ALONG

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND THE MAKING
OF POSTWAR ROMANIA

WORK IN GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Adrian Grama
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Work in Global and Historical Perspective

Edited by

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Work in Global and Historical Perspective is an interdisciplinary series that welcomes scholarship on work/labour that engages a historical perspective in and from any part of the world. The series advocates a definition of work/labour that is broad, and especially encourages contributions that explore interconnections across political and geographic frontiers, time frames, disciplinary boundaries, as well as conceptual divisions among various forms of commodified work, and between work and 'non-work'.

Volume 4

Adrian Grama

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Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar
Romania

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List of abbreviations

ANR:	Arhivele Naționale Române (Romanian National Archives)
ANCS:	Arhivele Județene Caraș-Severin (County Archives of Caraș-Severin)
AMB:	Arhivele Municipale București (Municipal Archives of Bucharest)
BNR:	Banca Națională a României (The National Bank of Romania)
CC al PCR:	Comitetul Central al PCR (The Central Committee of PCR).
CGM:	Confederația Generală a Muncii (The General Confederacy of Labor)
CML:	Corpul Muncitoresc Legionar (Legionary Workers' Corp)
DAR:	Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens (German Workers of Romania)
DGP:	Direcția Generală a Poliției (Police General Agency)
FUM:	Frontul Unic Muncitoresc (The Only Workers' Front)
GEG:	Grupul Etnic German (The German Ethnic Group)
MM:	Ministerul Muncii (The Ministry of Labor)
MO:	Monitorul Oficial (The Official Monitory)
PCR:	Partidul Comunist Român (The Romanian Communist Party)
PNT:	Partidul Național Țărănesc (The National Peasant Party)
PSD:	Partidul Social Democrat (The Social Democratic Party)
UDR:	Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița (The Plants and Domains Reșița)
UGIR:	Uniunea Generală a Industriașilor Români (The General Union of Romanian Industrialists)

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Introduction

On August 18, 1945, nearly one year after Romania declared war on Germany, its former ally, and roughly six months after the Romanian Communist Party was entrusted by the Soviets to form a coalition government in Bucharest, the Politburo met to take stock of the state of Romanian industrial production. The picture was predictably grim. The production of coal and steel dropped dramatically throughout the first half of 1945 although the total number of employees in these core industries remained the same as during their peak year of 1943. Party leaders had been paying particular attention to the southwestern town of Reșița, where the country's largest integrated steel mill was located, because steelworkers had supposedly formulated wage demands even though "you can clearly see entire workshops laying idle for the whole day."¹ In southern Transylvania and Bucharest, where some of the manufacturing industry was clustered, the situation was no different; and so too across the oilfields north of the capital city and in the mining region of the Jiu Valley. The steel, coal and oil that fueled the war economy, enabling Romania's national railway company to transport military troops, ammunition, Jews and Gypsies eastward into the occupied lands of the Soviet Union, was now required to satisfy peace-time needs. After years of record-breaking production in the service of destruction, tens of thousands of steelworkers, machine operators and miners had to be mobilized yet again to support the battle for postwar reconstruction.

The meeting, therefore, abounded in plans for the immediate future. Arriving from Moscow, where she had lived during the war, party boss Ana Pauker looked with admiration at "capitalist America" for its ability to rely on "native capitalists" for reconstruction, and to neighboring Bulgaria for its capacity to deploy the bureaucracy of the state to "end the difficult circumstances after the war".² Out of prison, where he had served eleven years for being involved in a strike back in 1933, party boss Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej justified giving miners "substantial food" on the following grounds:

If we strengthen their physical shape, we increase the efficiency of their work. What we spend on this food we get back twofold or threefold through the boost in coal output. We also establish wage and provisioning systems that will make mining a sought-after job. We will create all the conditions for people to stop running away from mining; we

1 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 70/1945, p. 3.

2 IBIDEM, p. 15.

will make it very attractive, a sort of California where the daring and the decided will rush in to grab the abundant coal.³

Coal and steel were indeed precious commodities after the war, yet no region of Romania ended up “a sort of California”. Instead of experiencing the thrills of a new gold rush, Romanian workers found themselves drifting towards the Soviet Union, having been summoned to rebuild their country after the Second World War and carry it further into socialism. This book asks how, in Pauker’s words, the “difficult circumstances after the war” were put an end to and how workers in metal industries and mining were made to cast iron and ferret out coal in the service of reconstruction and socialism. In other words, how were the social consequences of the Second World War in the sphere of labor relations mastered and overcome, and how was industrial production steered out of post-war idleness and geared towards growth?

These questions invite us to consider “the postwar” as a self-standing historical period characterized by accelerated social and economic change that deeply affected working-class communities. In this context, industrial workers mattered not simply because the Second World War was fought on the homefront as much as on the frontline or because the emerging state socialist system after 1948 was a political project grounded in the Bolshevik affirmation of a particular vision of proletarian modernity:⁴ industrial workers mattered because the string of dictatorships of the Right and of the Left that succeeded each other in Romania beginning with the late 1930s were eminently participatory, demanding proof of commitment in addition to muted consent from their subjects.⁵ In an overwhelmingly agrarian country such as Romania, industrial workers were a prized minority valued for their symbolic visibility and strategic availability. Moreover, steelworkers and miners mattered because the type of economy mobilized during the war, reconstructed after 1945 and streamlined on Soviet planning principles dur-

3 IBIDEM, p. 39.

4 Jeffrey Fear, “War of the Factories”, in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume III. Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 94–121.

5 Alf Lüdtke, “Ordinary People, Self-Energizing, and Room for Manoeuvring: Examples from 20th Century Europe”, in Alf Lüdtke (ed.) *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorships: Collusion and Evasion* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 13–34. For the panoply of rightwing dictatorships in Romania before and during the Second World War, see Constantin Iordachi, “A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937–44”, in A. Costa Pinto and A. Kallis (eds.) *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 233–271.

ing the 1950s revolved around the steel mill, the universal symbol of industrial progress across the globe during the middle decades of the twentieth century.⁶

Placed in the context of mass dictatorship and an economy driven by steel output, this book offers the first social history of industrial workers in Romania between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, a historical conjuncture I refer to as “the postwar”.⁷ By closely examining the workers’ social universe in and outside of the factory, notably the ways in which everyday life in industrial milieux came to be transformed after 1945, I aim to show how the social consequences of the Second World War were absorbed in the transition to state socialism. I argue that in the sphere of labor relations – the network of relations between workers, management, trade-unions, political parties and state bureaucracies – the impact of the war was overcome through the “politics of productivity”. Firstly, I explain what I mean by the politics of productivity and how this conceptual framework can enrich current historiographies devoted to the postwar period in East Central Europe and state socialism more broadly. Secondly, I critically locate my own research in the emerging field of social and cultural history of industrial workers under state socialism. Thirdly, I discuss historical method, the use of archives and the relevance of my case study for a comparative analysis of the postwar period in mid-twentieth century Europe. Finally, I end with a general outline of the five chapters of the book.

Periodizing the Postwar

“Is ‘postwar’ a period or a concept?” asks Dan Stone in a recent handbook devoted to “historicizing” Eastern and Western European history after 1945.⁸ Thus framed, the question begs not so much an answer as an analytical clarification, for it points to the uneasiness historians face in extending this temporal

6 For the fascination with the integrated steel mill across the globe, see Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3, 2000, 822.

7 For an outline of the “mass dictatorship” paradigm of research, see Jie-Hyun Lim, “Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth Century Dictatorship”, in Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (eds.) *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorships: Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 1–22. For steel output as a measure of economic performance after 1945 see Charles S. Maier, “The World Economy and the Cold War in the Middle of the Twentieth Century”, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume I. Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48–52.

8 Dan Stone, “Postwar Europe as History”, in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

category across the European continent. While it is well established that Western Europe had a postwar period marked by liberation, reconstruction, political stability and unparalleled economic growth stretching from the onset of the Cold War to the crisis of the 1970s – Eric Hobsbawm’s “golden age”, it is less clear whether the same applies to Europe’s Eastern half.⁹ Indeed, to dub the postwar period a “golden age” (1947–1973) may appear unwarranted, particularly in view of the trajectory of East European countries, many of which might have experienced comparable annual rates of growth only to see their sovereign territory occupied by Soviet troops, their civil societies incapacitated through police terror and their political systems monopolized by communist parties under Moscow’s hegemony.¹⁰ How, then, should the East European ‘postwar’ be periodized? Moreover, what would be the conceptual value of thinking about post-1945 Eastern Europe in terms of a postwar period? What social and economic processes characterized this period behind the Iron Curtain?

Firstly, consider the narrative strategy employed by Tony Judt in his *summa* of recent European history. Rather than lumping together a whole epoch of economic growth, Judt distinguishes between the postwar proper (1945–1953) and a subsequent time frame entitled “prosperity and its discontents” (1953–1971). The scope of this periodization, while allowing for Western and Eastern Europe to be analyzed in terms of economic reconstruction, is primarily contrastive. Its rationale is to underline the distinctive path undertaken by the communist regimes of the East:

Seen in this light, the economic history of Eastern Europe after 1945 bears a passing resemblance to the pattern of West European recovery in the same years. In western Europe, too, investment in productivity and growth was given priority over the provision of consumer goods and services, though the Marshall Plan softened the pain of this strategy. In Western Europe, too, certain industrial sectors and regions took off from low starting points, and a dramatic transition from countryside to town took place in the course of the 1950s in Italy and France in particular. But there the similarity ends. The distinctive feature of the economic history of communist Eastern Europe is that, in addition to coal, steel, factories

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 225–402. Recent bestsellers on the postwar period include Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (London: Penguin, 2014) and Victor Sebestyen, *1946: The Making of the Modern World* (London: Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁰ I have summarized here the objection raised to Hobsbawm’s periodization of the postwar by Krzysztof Pomian, “Quel XXe siècle?”, *Le Débat*, No. 93, 1997, 3–5. According to Pomian, a less parochial temporal category that might account for the experience of Eastern Europe after 1945 while remaining faithful to Hobsbawm’s criteria might simply be called “the age of growth” (*l’âge de la croissance*).

and apartment blocks, first-generation Soviet industrialization produced grotesque distortions and contradictions, more so even than in the USSR itself.¹¹

For Judt, what barred Eastern Europe entry into the age of “prosperity and its discontents” was Sovietization, a process triggered in the immediate postwar period that led to “a winter of inertia and resignation, punctuated by cycles of protest and subjugation, that would last for nearly four decades.”¹² Two objections can immediately be raised against this view. The first is that according to Judt’s understanding, Eastern Europe’s postwar period is subsumed under a telological scheme, whereby the outcomes of industrial development are taken as its causes: the “grotesque distortions” were there from the very beginning.¹³ The second is that “the passing resemblance” between the recovery plans on the two sides of the continent ought to be taken seriously as a criterion for periodization rather than as a fact of economic history. Indeed, as Mark Mazower argued, historians of the postwar period should account for the apparent similarity between Eastern and Western Europe:

Economically, both halves of Europe saw high savings and investment ratios, austerity programs, and heavy investment in capital goods industries as means of moving from immediate postwar reconstruction to longer-term development in ways that – despite international transfers through Marshall Plan – were fundamentally based upon internally generated sources of funds organized by national governments in closed economies.¹⁴

To periodize “the postwar” starting from the closed nature of the economy – the “internally generated” drives for rationalization and productivity campaigns, the structure of investments, wage systems, and austerity – might indeed reveal a set of structural factors, social processes and industrial policies that undergirded the transition out of the war economy both in the East and the West. This con-

11 Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 170 – 171.

12 IBIDEM, 195.

13 I do not dispute the fact that Soviet-style industrialization was replete with contradictions, or that, in the long run, it proved a failure. I merely point out that Judt’s assessment is teleological to the extent it benefits from the hindsight of the transformations the global economy underwent during the second half of the twentieth century, which retrospectively showed Soviet-style industrialization to be obsolete. For the postwar period, labor intensive development seemed plausible, particularly in countries such as Romania, where capital goods were scarce and labor plentiful. For this argument, see Mark Mazower, *The Dark Continent. Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1998), 272.

14 Mark Mazower, “Changing Trends in the Historiography of Postwar Europe, East and West”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 58, 2000, 280 – 281.

ceptual operation, while never repudiating the fundamental difference between the Soviet-type “command economy” and capitalist economies, would rather seek to explain the ways in which both reconstruction and longer-term development were pursued in widely different national contexts affected by the Second World War. Moreover, this perspective would discard the all-encompassing notion of industrialization, to focus instead on the dynamics of its constituent parts – capital and labor – particularly as these dynamics overdetermined the contradictory transformation of labor relations.

The framework advocated here opens up three interrelated fields of investigation for historical interpretation. Firstly, to think in terms of “the postwar” in Eastern Europe requires close attention to the impact of the war in various aspects of social life, from the change in popular attitudes and the destruction of the built environment to the organization of food provisioning and the collapse of the national currency. Secondly, with this view, Sovietization would necessarily be grounded not just in high politics (and geopolitics), but also in everyday life as more and more people were called upon to participate in the process of overcoming the social consequences of the war. Finally, giving Eastern Europe its own postwar period responds to Holly Case’s recent call to interrogate the existence of “global trends at work in the immediate postwar period in terms of economic planning ideas and practices, raw materials and labor issues” that might broaden the scope of comparison beyond Western Europe to incorporate other parts of the world.¹⁵ I will now expand on these suggestions.

Nearly three decades ago, Jan T. Gross urged historians to study the impact of the Second World War on East European societies as if they were mapping a genuine social revolution. What Gross meant in outlining this research agenda was the following: without a proper appreciation of the social changes induced by German occupation and hegemony, the war economy, the expropriation and murder of the Jews, mass mobilization and the extension of the role of the state, the nature of the postwar period would be fundamentally misunderstood. In Gross’s periodization “the Nazi-instigated war and the Communist-driven postwar takeovers constituted one integral period.”¹⁶ Moreover, explored with the help of social rather than political history, the emergence of state socialism in Eastern Europe might be shown to have benefitted from a number of significant continuities with the war period, rather than institute a “drastic rupture” with

¹⁵ Holly Case, “Reconstruction in East-Central Europe: Clearing the Rubble of Cold War Politics”, *Past & Present*, Supplement 6, 2011, 101–102.

¹⁶ Jan T. Gross, “Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration”, in István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (eds.) *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 31.

the past as communist apologists and historians of high politics were keen on emphasizing.¹⁷ The social consequences of the war, of which Gross underlined economic growth, etatization and ethnic homogeneity, therefore, deeply structured the postwar societies across the region.¹⁸

This book extends Gross's argument in order to examine the manner in which the reassembling of labor relations on the homefront between 1940 and 1945 shaped the postwar period. Much like in other countries involved in the conflict, core parts of Romanian industry were militarized from 1941 to serve the war effort, a policy that effectively resulted in increased surveillance of militant workers and the brutalization of everyday interactions at factory level. Coupled with the disbandment of trade-unions in late 1940 and the institution of state control over wage increases, the wartime labor regime that emerged by 1941 worsened working conditions and alienated workers. At the same time, however, the total number of workers in industry almost doubled as many Romanians took up industrial jobs not only to eschew the draft but also to benefit from preferential provisioning and the food rations secured through the place of employment. Some factory owners, notably of Jewish origin, were expropriated, while German capital and German industrial experts took over key positions in the domestic industry, especially in oil and armament production.¹⁹ Bucharest's largest industrial plant – Malaxa Works – was taken over by the Romanian state in 1941 and rented out to a joint stock company controlled by German business. Later that year, the Nazi conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring took over Romania's largest steel mill – Uzinele și Domeniile Statului Reșița (U.D.R.), owning enough shares in the company to be able to appoint a new board of administrators. Such transformations of the structure of ownership were typical of German dominance over its satellites in Eastern Europe and would continue into the postwar period as well, this time with the Soviets taking over German capital

17 "The conclusion emerges that for adequate conceptualization of communist takeovers in East Central Europe we must change the periodization and begin the analysis with the outbreak of the Second World War.", Jan T. Gross, "Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe", *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1989, 205.

18 For an elaboration of Gross's research agenda on the social consequences of the war, see Bradley F. Abrams, "The Second World War and the East European Revolution", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2002, 623–664.

19 On the oil industry, see Maurice Pearton, *Oil and the Romanian State, 1895–1948* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); on the crucial role played by Romanian oilfields in the transnational German war economy, see Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 309, 381 *et passim*.

via joint stock companies.²⁰ The war economy, moreover, saw an unprecedented extension of the state in the sphere of labor relations, both as a repressive apparatus policing industrial milieux and as a legal mediator, most often ruling in favor of the workers in labor disputes.²¹

Combining violence and relative privilege, oppression and a modicum of welfare, the wartime labor regime prepared the ground for the wave of popular radicalism that ensued. The downfall of the military dictatorship in late August 1944 allowed Romania to switch sides in the war and turn against Germany, followed by the revival of political pluralism and the reemergence of the trade-union movement.²² Between September 1944 and March 1945, three coalition governments brigading the main political parties and headed by military prime-ministers ran the country on the brink of civil war. Mounting Soviet pressure successfully installed a communist dominated government in early March 1945 under an umbrella coalition gathering the political forces of the Left and various sympathetic political entrepreneurs.²³ Reconfirmed by the admittedly rigged elections of November 1946, this governing coalition was slowly swallowed by the Romanian Communist Party, a process that ended the brief experiment with “popular democracy”, forcing the King to abdicate in December 1947, and instituting the Popular Republic of Romania.²⁴

Historians’ efforts to make sense of this series of political events are organized by two interrelated notions: “communist takeover” and “Sovietization”. The first notion is employed to document the manifold tactics used by the communist parties and their Soviet patrons in pursuit of political supremacy between

20 For the larger context see Richard Overy, “Business in the Grossraumwirtschaft: Eastern Europe, 1938–1945”, in Harold James and Jakob Tanner (eds.), *Enterprise in the Period of Fascism in Europe* (London: Ashgate, 2002), 151–178.

21 In stressing wartime oppression and violence, official communist historiography completely ignored the fact that industrial employment on the homefront brought a certain degree of material security to the workers; see N. N. Constantinescu and Tudor Paul, “Aspecte ale situației clasei muncitoare din România în perioada 1941 – august 1944”, *Analele Institutului de istorie a Partidului de pe lângă C.C. al P.M.R.*, No. 5, 1962, 61–88.

22 On the events of the *coup* of late August 1944, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940–44* (London: Palgrave, 2006), 230–245.

23 For the appointment of the Petru Groza Cabinet in March 1945, see the classic account of Alfred J. Rieber, “The Crack in the Plaster: Crisis in Romania and the Origins of the Cold War”, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2004, 62–106.

24 The best concise account is still Bela Vago, “Romania”, in Martin McCauley (ed.) *Communist Power in Europe, 1944–1949* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 111–132. On the elections of November 1946, see Virgil Târâu, *Alegeri fără opțiune. Primele alegeri parlamentare din centrul și estul Europei după încheierea celui de-al doilea război mondial* (Cluj: Eikon, 2005).

1945 and 1947²⁵; the second notion describes the epoch opened up after 1948, one characterized by the domestication of a Soviet blueprint in all spheres of social life from the collectivization of agriculture and the erection of a police state to the nationalization of industry and the remaking of the educational system.²⁶ The two notions often work in tandem, with the “takeover” preceding and foreshadowing the process of Sovietization, and the establishment of the Communist Information Bureau in September 1947 as the key event that confirmed “Stalin’s growing conviction that the East European states must conform to his own harsh methods of dictatorial rule.”²⁷ Grounded in high politics – i.e. the domain of elite struggle over public resources – the periodization that informs both these notions is crafted to reveal changing power dynamics at the level of the state.²⁸

Although not ignoring high politics altogether, this book primarily examines the transformation of everyday politics within Romanian factories between the mid-1940s and late 1950s. This shift of perspective, I argue, sheds a more nuanced light on the process of Sovietization. Understood as the realm of obstinate self-assertion of needs, interests and desires, everyday politics turns the spotlight onto ordinary workers and the manner in which they appropriated,

25 Works on the “communist takeover” include Karel Kaplan, *The Short March. The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1948* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1987); Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and, in a different vein, Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

26 For a summary of the literature, see E. A. Rees, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe”, in Balázs Apór, Péter Apór and E.A. Rees (eds.) *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 2–28; for a comparative analysis of a specific topic, see John Connelly, *Captive University. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); for a broad comparative grasp of Sovietization, see Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944–1956* (London: Anchor, 2013).

27 Mark Kramer, “Stalin, Soviet Policy, and the Establishment of a Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, 1941–1948”, in Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (eds.) *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286. Recent scholarship on the relationships between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after 1945 agrees that Stalin had “not even a road map” for Sovietization but rather reacted to developments occurring in the West, Norman M. Naimark, “Stalin and Europe in the Postwar Period, 1945–53: Issues and Problems”, *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2004, 36.

28 Norman M. Naimark, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944–1953”, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume I. Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195–197.

contested and negotiated the conditions under which they lived and worked.²⁹ Not only does everyday politics open up the topic of postwar popular radicalism and the strategies through which communist parties in power came to contain it, it also takes into serious account industrial policy making and workers' reaction to it. This is particularly timely since both popular radicalism and industrial policy making have been misread by the "communist takeover" historiography of Romania. Take the case of Ghiță Ionescu, an exiled Romanian political scientist and the author of *Communism in Romania, 1944–1962*, a remarkable analysis, given the paucity of sources the author worked with.³⁰ In arguing the situation in postwar Romania resembled the Vichy regime in France, Ionescu used moral categories to evaluate the range of attitudes Romanians adopted vis-à-vis the new communist authorities, distinguishing between a minority of opportunists and a passive majority that seldom engaged in acts of open resistance. Ionescu did not exclude genuine feelings of support for the communist party, but assigned them to the divisive role the party assumed. Characteristically, the key industrial policy of the postwar period, namely the signing of collective labor contracts in 1946, appeared as "another gambit designed to cause distrust between management and workers."³¹

This book proposes a different interpretation of these phenomena. Rather than advancing an image of a divided postwar society further cleaved by industrial policies, I argue that workers had their own politics, which sometimes aligned them with the communist party, yet most times went beyond the moderate approach encouraged by party bosses and trade-union leaders.³² Purges of

²⁹ For a conceptual history of "everyday politics" as a category of analysis, see Frank Trentmann, "The Politics of Everyday Life", in Frank Trentmann (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 522–547.

³⁰ Proof of the lasting influence of Ionescu's study on Romanian historiography can be seen in that some of the best researched works to emerge after the opening of the archives in the 1990s did not dispute any of the claims he advanced in the early 1960s. See the articles collected in Șerban Papacostea (ed.) *6 martie 1945: începuturile comunizării României* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1995) and more recently Dumitru Șandru, *Comunizarea societății românești în anii 1944–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007).

³¹ Ghiță Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944–1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 101. For the Vichy metaphor see page 97. For a more elaborate critique of the "Vichy metaphor" in Romanian historiography, see Adrian Grama, "Practices of Distance and Perceptions of Proximity: Trade-Union Delegates and Everyday Politics in Post-Second World War Romania", in Muriel Blaive (ed.) *Perceptions of Society in Communist Europe. Regime Archives and Popular Opinion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 33–48.

³² The best analysis of the moderate position of the communist parties in relation to workers' radicalism across postwar Eastern Europe is Mark Pittaway, "Making Postwar Communism", in

compromised engineers and managers, wildcat strikes, food riots and spontaneous collective gestures of violence undertaken by radicalized workers were frowned upon as expressions of political “backwardness” that discredited the communist party’s commitment to reconstruction. Moreover, because popular radicalism was judged to impede production by undermining factory hierarchy, the communist party, far from causing distrust between management and workers, as Ionescu claimed, looked to strengthen the authority of management often at the expense of its own constituency. Rather than a moral trait of the majority, passivity was a political passion of the multitude as it grappled with the social consequences of the war and navigated the pressure of reconstruction, stubbornly remaining deaf to calls to sacrifice, thrift and hard work.³³

The question as to how collective labor contracts were implemented brings me to the politics of productivity. Whereas Jan T. Gross’s research agenda is useful for understanding how the experience of the homefront and the transformations of the economy and the state that took place during the first half of the 1940s shaped Sovietization; the politics of productivity indicates a temporal arch that delineates the postwar period. By “politics of productivity”, I understand a comprehensive, if contradictory, set of policies and plans undertaken by the Romanian Communist Party, often on the advice of Soviet experts, to recover, consolidate, and boost the efficiency of industrial production. The politics of productivity undergirded both postwar reconstruction before 1948 and the building of socialism that came after, blurring the lines between the two as the communist party sought to overcome the social consequences of the war and implement Soviet production techniques in the sphere of labor relations.

The signing of collective labor contracts in 1946 was but one example of this process. Collective labor contracts already regulated labor relations in the interwar period, serving as a common ground between trade-unions and management for bargaining over wages, working conditions and benefits. During the war economy, as trade-unions were abolished and the state acquired control over wage increases in order to hold inflation in check, collective labor contracts gradually ceased to play a role in bargaining procedures. The first postwar collective labor contracts, while keeping wages off the bargaining table for the

Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 267–269.

33 For the argument that “apathy and indifference” made Sovietization (and Stalinism) appealing for communist party bosses in postwar Eastern Europe as a way of forcing people to participate in reconstruction, see Norman M. Naimark, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe”, in Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (eds.) *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 77.

same anti-inflationary reasons, brought back negotiations between unions and management on issues of provisioning and benefits, which in turn fed myriad instances of violent protest. Under the influence of Soviet labor law, beginning in 1949, collective labor contracts were rewritten to include productivity indicators whereby workers' access to benefits was made dependent not on collective bargaining but rather on output figures.

The same transition towards productivity indicators can be detected if we examine the trajectory of the industrial wage scale. To compensate for the impact of inflation on workers' purchasing power, the war economy inaugurated indexing mechanisms whereby the quantum of the wages was determined by living standards, with higher wages paid to urban workers on the grounds they were less self-sufficient than rural workers owning a plot of land. This mechanism was slightly altered after 1945. Yet, according to communist party bosses, the side effect of indexing wages was a decoupling of pay from performance and a certain "levelling" of remuneration across industries. Therefore, efforts to halt inflation after 1947 also entailed the remaking of the wage scale by abandoning indexing and pushing for piece-rate payment schemes based on productivity.

None of these policies were unique to Eastern Europe. Indeed, according to Charles Maier, varieties of the politics of productivity characterized much of postwar Western Europe and Japan under US hegemony.³⁴ The Marshall Plan in particular was informed by an American version of the politics of productivity as industrial experts pushed for the remaking of wage scales, the rationalization of the labor process, the recovery of managerial authority and workers' discipline.³⁵ Discursively, the emphasis on productivity mainly served the twin purposes of linking issues regarding redistribution, such as wage increases, to output figures

34 The classical account is Charles S. Maier, "The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II", *In Search of Stability. Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 121–153.

35 I am simplifying the findings of a rich research tradition; for the remaking of wage scales in the context of the postwar monetary reforms, see Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires. American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 204–217. For individual case studies of the politics of productivity touching on many of these issues, see Kurt K. Tweraser, "The Politics of Productivity and Corporatism: The Late Marshall Plan in Austria, 1950–1954", in Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, Rolf Steininger (eds.) *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, Vol. 3, Austria in the 1950s (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995), 91–115; Vibeke Sørensen, *Denmark's Social Democratic Government and the Marshall Plan, 1947–1950* (Aarhus: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 76–113 and Andrew Gordon, "Contests for the Workplace", in Andrew Gordon (ed.) *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 373–394. Gordon devoted a whole book to the politics of productivity in postwar Japan, *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

thus silencing trade-union demands for larger shares of the profit on the one hand; and justifying the deferment of immediate gratification on the other, thereby allowing for investment funds to be poured into technological upgrading and capital accumulation rather than consumption. Or, as historian Victoria de Grazia argued:

Though often regarded as the starting point for Western Europe's postwar boom, the Marshall Plan was not at all conceived to create a consumer's Europe. [...] Consequently, the first priority of aid was to boost productivity by investing in industrial retooling and infrastructure such as power stations, electric grids, port facilities, and railroad bridges. For the time being, national levels of consumption were not to exceed the prewar benchmark of 1938. Accordingly, no aid was to be released to refurbish ragged wardrobes, replenish war-ravaged homes with household crockery and furnishings, pay for pensions, much less raise wages.³⁶

To be sure, under Soviet hegemony, Eastern Europe hardly received any aid for postwar reconstruction and development, apart from Moscow's symbolic reduction of the payments due as war reparations. And yet, even in the absence of such aid, communist party bosses, industrial planners, Soviet advisors, and local managers were all equally enthralled by the promises of productivity. Taken over from Soviet industrial practice, where the term had made a comeback immediately after the war ended to guide the recovery of production in places such as the steel town of Magnitogorsk, the notion of productivity in postwar Romania quickly became the rallying cry of the communist party.³⁷ For over a decade and a half after the end of the Second World War, calls for higher productivity served to mute wage demands and legitimize performance wages, justified austerity and consumers' sacrifice, informed successive rationalization attempts of the labor process and structured investment priorities. The politics associated with raising productivity, first to reach prewar output levels and then to prove the efficiency of state socialism, defined an entire historical epoch, thereby mediating the transition out of the war economy and setting the trajectory of growth for much of the 1950s.

³⁶ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 346.

³⁷ Joon-Seo Song, "The Legacy of World War II on the Stalinist Home Front: Magnitogorsk, 1941–1953", (PhD Dissertation: Michigan State University, 2007), 122–179. For the making of Magnitogorsk, the classic account is Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Industrial Workers and State Socialism

No other working class has been invested with so much hope during the twentieth century as the one emerging under state socialist regimes, first in the Soviet Union and then, after 1945, across Eastern Europe and Asia. The rulers of those regimes hoped for the working class to provide unconditional support and looked forward to an epoch when, having been guided by the communist party through the maze of catch-up industrialization, workers could finally enjoy the spoils of communism. Critics of state socialism hoped the working class could prove to be the gravedigger of those regimes, frustrated by the failure of communism to keep up with the ever changing needs and desires of its workers.³⁸ Both views were fundamentally informed by a historicist reading of historical development, not unlike the one articulated in *Capital* where Marx analyzed the trajectory of the “working day” in order to point out the indeterminate nature of labor under emergent capitalism.³⁹ Since under state socialism, too, the length of the working day or the cost of labor were subject to negotiation, struggle and change, the needs and desires of socialist workers were also likely to evolve, shaping their self-understanding over time.⁴⁰ In the end, socialist industrialization, urbanization and mass literacy produced a working class animated by myriad dreams and expectations, many of which arguably helped to push those very regimes into crisis and collapse.⁴¹ Small wonder that the popular (in both senses of the term) critique of state socialism, before and after 1989, was often rooted in ordinary people’s unfulfilled consumer desires and the “greyness” of everyday

38 For an attempt to determine the potential for oppositional sentiment among Eastern European workers following the economic crisis of the 1970s, see Jan F. Triska and Charles Gati (eds.) *Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

39 I follow the interpretation proposed in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 317.

40 The indeterminate value of labor is often referred to as commodified labor. For an analysis of how labor was commodified under state socialism and the types of imaginaries it brought about among workers of various backgrounds, see Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Martha Lampland, *The Value of Labor: The Science of Commodification in Hungary, 1920–1956* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).

41 For a recent restatement of this argument, see Don Kalb, “‘Worthless Poles’ and Other Dispossessions. Toward an Anthropology of Labor in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe”, in Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella (eds.) *Blood and Fire. Toward a Global Anthropology of Labor* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 258. For a critique of the assumption that consumer desire under state socialism entails a political logic of its own, see Krisztina Fehérváry, “Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2009, 426–459.

life, a culture of complaint that would have been unthinkable for the generation of the 1950s.⁴²

To be sure, the story certainly was an ironic one. One sociologist researching Hungarian steelworkers in the 1980s found state socialism much more politically unstable than capitalism because “workers all over the country define themselves in relation to a common exploiter”, namely the workers’ state.⁴³ Nevertheless, both the rulers of state socialism and their Cold War critics had good reasons to hold to their beliefs. In Eastern Europe, industrial workers obliged in showing support for the regime during years of modest consumerism under Kádár or Honecker, just like the previous generation rebelled against plummeting living standards in 1953 and 1956. Whereas critics of state socialism praised workers for their involvement in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and *Solidarność*, communist party leaders must have felt reassured at the sight of tens of thousands of workers driving their Škodas, Dacias and Trabbis to the sunny beaches of the Black Sea, the Baltic or the Adriatic.⁴⁴ In this context, questions of legitimacy, stability, contestation, support, repression and accommodation naturally migrated to the historiographical field, both before and after the fall of state socialism in 1989/1991.

Similar questions have been analyzed and, to the extent that evidence has allowed, answered by historians of the Soviet Union, particularly those researching the Russian Revolution and the coming of Stalinism. To examine the degree of support Bolsheviks received among workers in Moscow and Saint Petersburg or the manner in which the drive for industrialization launched by Stalin after 1928 dislocated vast pools of labor from the countryside were necessary to advance our knowledge of the Soviet Union. Histories of metalworkers, printers and textile workers revealed a social universe punctuated by strikes, violence,

⁴² For a recent sample of such critiques of the communist past in Romania, see Ioana Pârvulescu (ed.) *Și eu am trăit în comunism* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015). Many, if not all of the contributors to this volume recall the material shortages of the 1980s and contrast them with the alleged abundance of the “West” rather than with the modest consumerism of the 1970s and late 1960s in Romania, decades that made available the very objects of criticism in the first place (i.e. central heating, televised popular entertainment, mass produced food etc).

⁴³ Michael Burawoy, “Reflections on the Class Consciousness of Hungarian Steelworkers”, *Politics and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1989, 20.

⁴⁴ It is telling that my own childhood photo album is made up of colored pictures taken at the Black Sea during the late 1980s, a period marked by one of the most brutal, self-imposed austerity programs in the history of the twentieth century. Comprising food rationing, cuts in electricity and heat, austerity served the Ceaușescu regime in paying the foreign debt accumulated during the 1970s, see Cornel Ban, “Sovereign Debt, Austerity, and Regime Change: The Case of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2012, 743–767.

slowdowns and riots, with workers amending or appropriating many of the industrial policies tried out during the interwar period.⁴⁵ If these forms of protest symbolized anything, however, it was not the power of workers but rather their collective weakness vis-à-vis overwhelming managerial, police and trade-union bureaucracies. Indeed, as two distinguished practitioners of the field concluded in a summary of decades of research, studies of Soviet workers contributed to a heightened sense of the “irony of Soviet history”, namely “that workers in an ostensibly ‘Marxist’ state were more alienated than empowered”, all leading to “the degeneration of the promises of social liberation and the apotheosis of a new form of tyranny over the very people in whose name the system was created.”⁴⁶

Compared to other traditions of research in labor history, three specificities of this body of scholarship stand out.⁴⁷ Firstly, efforts to go beyond the focus on classical male workers were rare; and so too were attempts to abandon the shop-floor as the paradigmatic social space for locating the meaning of workers’ everyday life. Precarious work, rural labor, and the wide array of places where work was performed in the shadows of the standard employment relationship (from the household to collective farms) attracted little attention. Secondly, in contradistinction with much of the labor history produced over the last decades on Latin America, the African continent or even Western European countries, studies of Soviet industrial workers rarely abandoned grand narratives, shifting between analyses of proletarianization and similar processes of class formation to fitting workers’ lives into straightjacket theories of state socialism and modernity. Finally, with a few notable exceptions, labor historians of the Soviet

⁴⁵ For a concise stock taking of this literature, see Stephen Kotkin, “A Future for Labor under Communism”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 50, 1996, 1–8. For more recent developments, see David Shearer, “Workers, Revolution, and Stalinism”, *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, 227–248. For a general survey that includes Asia as well, see Tuong Vu, “Workers under Communism: Romance and Reality”, in Stephen A. Smith (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 471–485.

⁴⁶ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, “Class Backwards? In Search of the Soviet Working Class”, in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.) *Soviet Workers. Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 24.

⁴⁷ I follow here the critique proposed by Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “The Late Romance of the Soviet Worker in Western Historiography”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 51, 2006, 463–481.

Union were tempted to discard the relevance of official scripted languages as a medium that structured workers' emotions, beliefs and attitudes.⁴⁸

Unencumbered by the existence of any genuine tradition of research in labor history, historians of Eastern Europe owed a great deal to the debates and methodologies generated in the field of Soviet history.⁴⁹ In the introduction to a path-breaking special issue devoted to workers in postwar Eastern Europe and published by one of the field's leading academic journals, Mark Pittaway underlined the need to explore issues of consent, conflict and accommodation much like labor historians of the Soviet Union did before. Pittaway, however, went further by asking historians not only to take communism seriously as a "social experience" but also to carefully explore working class cultures and the way in which workers' durable dispositions shaped the emergence of state socialism after 1945. This was a methodological injunction that departed in two significant ways from the literature on the Soviet Union. First, it posited the legitimacy, stability and overall nature of the East European socialist state as something to be explained through the analytical priority accorded to social context in illuminating the trajectory of policies and politics at large.⁵⁰ Second, it grounded social context in workers' everyday lives, both within and outside of the factory, with the ambition to produce social histories that detail how communist authorities "attempt[ed] to reform working class cultures and the values and expectations that were rooted in such cultures across the region."⁵¹

48 See the discussion in Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin's "Magnetic Mountain" and the State of Soviet Historical Studies", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1996, 456–463.

49 This was valid not just for labor history but for many other branches of the discipline; see, for instance, Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Historicizing Everyday Life under Communism: The USSR and the GDR, Potsdam, 8–10 June 2000", *Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001, 72–79. Due to lack of space I cannot discuss here the burgeoning literature on workers in the GDR. For a recent synthesis that incorporates much of the literature published in German, see Christoph Klessmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR. Deutsche Traditionen, sowjetisches Modell, west-deutsches Magnetfeld (1945 bis 1971)*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2007).

50 For the primacy of social context as the defining ambition of social history, notably as it seeks to explain the trajectory of politics on different scales, see Geoff Eley and Keith Nield (eds.) *The Future of Class in History. What's Left of the Social?* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 19 *et passim*. For an early Marxian attempt in this vein, see Jon Bloomfield, *Passive Revolution: Politics and the Czechoslovak Working Class, 1945–1948* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

51 Mark Pittaway, "Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 68, 2005, 7. The special issue contains articles on Romania (Jack Friedman), Hungary (Eszter Zsófia Tóth and Sándor Horváth) and Czechoslovakia (Peter Heumos).

An early example of this manner of practicing labor history was Padraic Kenney's study of postwar Polish workers of Wrocław and Łódź, two contrasting urban settings displaying two very different working class communities.⁵² Covering the first five years after the end of the Second World War, Kenney's study showed how communist authorities managed to gain workers' support in Wrocław, a former German city quickly filled with Polish rural migrants in search of work, and encountered stiff opposition among textile workers in Łódź, one of Poland's traditional industrial enclaves. The absence of a working-class culture in Wrocław or, later on in the steel town of Nowa Huta, accounted for the ability of the emergent socialist state to integrate the workers in relative tranquility.⁵³ By contrast, the cluster of shopfloor solidarities and well-trodden work routines, embedded in neighborhood moral communities explained the resilience of Łódź's workers to withstand through striking and rioting activity the pressure of productivity campaigns launched by the communists.⁵⁴

In her own history of Polish workers after 1945, Małgorzata Fidelis adopted a similar strategy by comparing the experience of women entering industrial employment in three different locations exhibiting contrasting working-class cultures: the textile industries of Żyrardów, the coal mines of Katowice and the cotton factories of Zambrow, the latter a product of socialist industrialization during the mid-1950s. These sites allowed Fidelis to show how notions of gender remained key structuring structures for local power hierarchies, sometimes in spite of official plans to absorb women into the workforce and liberate them

52 Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); see also Padraic Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2, 1999, 399–425.

53 On Nowa Huta, see Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia. Nowa Huta, Stalinism and Polish Society, 1949–1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), particularly 44–97. As Lebow shows, although young Polish men of rural stock seemed to embrace intensified rhythms of work in, for instance, youth brigades, they were less compliant outside of the factories where a culture of rebellion, promiscuity, "hooliganism" and cosmopolitanism prevailed among the same workers. See also Katherine Lebow, "'We are Building a Common Home': The Moral Economy of Citizenship in Postwar Poland", in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (eds.) *Histories of the Aftermath. The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 215–230.

54 Padraic Kenney, "Working Class Community and Resistance in Pre-Stalinist Poland: The Pozański Textile Strike, Łódź, September 1947", *Social History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1993, 31–51. On the longer history of Łódź as the "Polish Manchester", see Kacper Pobłocki, "The Cunning of Class. Urbanization of Inequality in Postwar Poland", (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, Budapest, 2010).

from inherited forms of oppression.⁵⁵ Similarly, in his social history of postwar Hungarian workers, Mark Pittaway chose to explore comparatively the rural oil workers of the Zala County, the mining colony of Tatabánya and Budapest's industrial district of Újpest in order to show how "the regime established legitimacy, haltingly; how it maintained it tentatively; and how it lost it entirely in 1956, before compromising with a rather different kind of legitimacy".⁵⁶ What, then, is the main thrust of this literature?

Primo, these studies are inherently comparative, avoiding the pitfalls of methodological nationalism and underscoring the sheer diversity of local and regional industrial and working-class traditions. Secundo, the penchant for abstraction and theorizing that dominated much of Soviet labor history is severely blunted and overtaken by grounded attempts to explain specific phenomena. If theory creeps into the narrative it does so more as a sharpening tool for construing objects of analysis such as the state, culture, everyday life, etc, rather than to delineate "systemic" features of state socialism. Tertio, this scholarship shows the degree to which politics in state socialism took the form of a pervasive conflict of varying intensity between the imperatives of running the economy and workers' aspirations of wielding some control over the conditions under which they worked and lived.⁵⁷ In this view, workers' culture appeared as the ritualized expression of this generalized struggle, a resource at once material and symbolic to be mobilized in everyday politics at the point of production and beyond.

This book engages critically with many of the arguments listed above and retains the comparative framework by focusing on two contrasting industrial sites: the steel town of Reșița where Romania's largest and oldest integrated steel mill was located; and the industrial belt of the capital city Bucharest, where I look primarily at two metal factories, Malaxa Works and Laromet. Located in a mountainous area in southwestern Romania (Banat), Reșița was the hometown of UDR, a multinational company that managed the steel mill, various connected workshops for manufacturing bridges, armament, locomotives and railcars, a vast forestry domain and a string of surrounding coal and iron mines. Founded in the mid-19th century, the steel mill only took off during the first two decades of the 20th century, when the province was still part of the Aus-

55 Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

56 Mark Pittaway, *The Workers' State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), VIII. The quote comes from Nigel Swain's introduction to the volume.

57 This is one of the main arguments in Andrew Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

tro-Hungarian Empire, with a local population speaking German, Hungarian, Serbian, Czech and Romanian. Following the First World War, UDR became the pillar of the nascent Romanian heavy industry as the province was incorporated into an enlarged Romanian state.⁵⁸

Up until the mid-1930s, the majority of local steelworkers and miners in and around Reșița had been long associated with the social-democratic movement. The rise of Nazism in Germany and of domestic fascism in Romania saw the workforce split along ethnic and political lines, with Nazi and fascist organizations competing to replace the old trade-union movement. By contrast, the metal industry of Bucharest was a product of the post-Great Depression era when the Romanian state sheltered the birth of a national manufacturing industry to service the needs of the state, and in particular the military.⁵⁹ Unlike in the former provinces of the Dual Monarchy, the steelworkers of Bucharest were less politically active, mostly of rural and migrant background and hardly unionized. Yet here, too, workers shifted to the extreme right during the late 1930s, with the homegrown fascists entrenching themselves in the city's major factories.

The Question of Archives

Important as these developments were for the postwar period, this book is less a history of industry in Reșița or Bucharest and more one of larger social processes reflected in these two specific locations. This perspective has implications for the way in which I opted to gather, select and make use of archival material. Many details of local history in Bucharest and Reșița pertaining to the *longue durée* political, economic and social dynamics of these localities have been purposefully left out of the narrative. The lack of reliable secondary literature, particularly on Romanian regional history pushed me to outline larger contexts only to the extent they were strictly related to my case studies. Marked by unemployment and strikes in the early 1930s, recovery and growth after the Great Depression, the interwar period will be omitted. Equally, I will have little to say about the

⁵⁸ Rudolf Gräf, *Domeniul bănățean al StEG, 1855–1920* (Reșița: Editura Banatica, 1997); Radu Voinesco, *Une grande entreprise roumaine intégrée. Les aciéries et domaines de Reșița. Etude économique* (Bucharest: Marvan, 1937); and the general overview of David Turnock, "The Reșița Industrial Complex: Perspectives in Historical Geography", *GeoJournal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1993, 83–102.

⁵⁹ For a general overview, see Constantin Herbst, *Geografia industriei municipiului București* (PhD Dissertation, University of Bucharest, 1971).

structures of capital ownership and big business during those years.⁶⁰ Since this book covers roughly the period between the early 1940s and the late 1950s, much of my empirical material comes from three main sources: company and factory records; ministerial and police documents; and the archives produced after 1945 by the communist party at various levels, from the high offices of the Central Committee to the paperwork left behind by party organizations at regional, local and factory levels. Occasionally, I have also used the archives of the Romanian National Bank, mostly for reports on the state of the postwar economy.

It is worth mentioning at this point several obstacles that research in Romanian archives presents to the social historian. Unlike the case of the former GDR, where the disappearance of the socialist state through unification opened up its archives shortly after 1990, many Romanian archives produced between 1950 and 1989 still operate under arcane rules of secrecy, notably in the case of documents generated by the so-called Council of Ministers (*Consiliul de Miniștri*), the equivalent of the government.⁶¹ For example, folders detailing the role that Soviet industrial experts played in various wage reforms, evaluations of prices for basic commodities on peasant markets during the 1950s, standard of living statistics for the same period or issues of forced military labor are not available to the public. That these rules of secrecy still conceal pieces of otherwise trivial information of interest only to the specialized historian is due to the fact that the current Romanian state acknowledges and upholds a continuity of sovereignty with the socialist state of the pre-1989 epoch.⁶² If these documents were understandably kept secret by the state socialist dictatorship, there is no reason for them to still be secret today.

Moreover, state secrecy goes hand in hand with state poverty in the sense that the archives of public institutions have not yet been processed and are therefore also not open to the public. Due to the massive underfinancing of the National Archives, the records of key institutions such as the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Industry and Finance all

60 On these topics, see N.N. Constantinescu, V. Axenciuc, *Capitalismul monopolist în România* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1962). On the question of unemployment and strikes in the interwar period, rich in details but written from the standpoint of the communist party see the studies collected in N.N. Constantinescu (ed.) *Situația clasei muncitoare din România, 1914–1944* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966).

61 Alf Lüdtke “La République démocratique allemande comme histoire. Réflexions historiographiques”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1998, 3.

62 On the relationship between sovereignty, secrecy and state archives, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 25–28.

stop at 1948. With few exceptions, the same applies to the majority of factory archives after 1950, which have either been destroyed or find themselves in such a poor condition that it is unlikely that they will ever enter the public domain. Equally discouraging for the social historian of postwar Romania is the complete absence of trade-union archives after 1945, which are either lost or were never archived in the first place.⁶³ It is only in county archives that some fragmentary evidence on trade-unions covering the late 1940s and early 1950s may be uncovered.

These obstacles are only partly remedied by the total availability of the archives of the communist party and the near complete collections of factory newspapers hosted by the Academy Library in Bucharest. However, in spite of the party's ambition to control as many aspects of social life as possible, the great bulk of this party archive is not about the governing of society as such but rather about the inner machinery of the communist party governing its own members. This mammoth archive, therefore, cannot be entirely taken as a proxy for the missing archives of state institutions, factories or trade-unions. Nor should it be taken as the repository of esoteric knowledge collected for purposes of domination. From the early 1950s onwards, during party meetings or in reports to the higher echelons, ordinary party members already spoke the codified language of the newspapers, in a conspicuous effort to screen their own mishaps, show conformity, and please their superiors.

In order to keep the double bias of my evidence under control, a bias resulting from my relying excessively on party archives and from the fact that most of my sources were archived during state socialism, I adopted two strategies of narration. Firstly, I considered it necessary to make the history of my evidence transparent by integrating it into the larger history that this book aims to tell. This allowed me moments of authorial self-reflexivity during which I reflect on the nature of the sources by revealing the archival processes behind them and underlining the often intricate trajectories through which particular documents become sources in the first place. Secondly, I borrowed the so-called “*ricerca mi-*

63 This is a peculiarity of Romania rather than of other former state socialist countries in Eastern Europe. In Hungary, for instance, researchers can access not only the archives of trade-unions after 1945 but also the archives of women's trade-unions. I thank Susan Zimmermann for bringing this matter to my attention. For the Hungarian context, see Mark Pittaway, “Research in Hungarian Archives on Post-1945 History”, in his *From the Vanguard to the Margins, Workers in Hungary, 1939 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 215–221.

cronominativa” from Italian debates on early modern history.⁶⁴ This method starts out with a proper name that pops up randomly in a document and proceeds to build up fragmented biographies around it, crosschecking other archival sources, adding visual and literary material for thickening particular social contexts, all in order to grasp how seemingly disparate social processes converge even in the lives of the most anonymous of historical actors. “Ricerca micronominativa” allowed me to organize my material in a puzzle-solving manner and construct plots of varying coherence out of overwhelmingly one-sided evidence.

There is a drawback to both these strategies. Their combined effect at times makes the evidence seem impressionistic, a potpourri of cascading vignettes, glued together only by the overarching narrative framework of the individual chapters. Be that as it may, what I hope to achieve through my constant questioning of the archive and my concern with following up proper names along the paper trail is a genre of history writing that might be called ethnographic in the sense that it focuses at the same time on the “research object” and the “researching subject”.⁶⁵ This approach to the written record of the past has the merit of locating the meaning of a preserved document not just in its actual content but also in the bureaucratic practices that led to its preservation. In historical contexts in which the vast majority of surviving documents were produced by and for those in power, historians can hardly afford to ignore the multiple contexts that generated the sources and circumscribed their meaning.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter I “Reassembling Labor Relations on the Homefront (1941–1945)” examines the making of the wartime labor regime in order to determine the origins of workers’ radicalism and the transformation of industrial policy brought about by the Second World War. Throughout the chapter, I move between Reșița and Bucharest in an effort to compare, contrast and evaluate how steelworkers and miners in both locations experienced work and life on the homefront and how the requirements of the war economy restructured collective bargaining, factory paternalism and workers’ own politics. I explore the emergence of workers’ radical-

⁶⁴ Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, “Il nome e il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 14, No. 40, 1979, 186. For puzzle-solving as the bread and butter of the historian, see Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), 53–73.

⁶⁵ Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke, “Unsettling History: Introduction”, in Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke (eds.) *Unsettling History. Archiving and Narrating in Historiography* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010), 21.

ism after September 1944 against the background of wartime wage policies, the expansion of the state in the sphere of labor relations, as well as the policing and brutalization of everyday interactions on the shopfloor and beyond.

Chapter II “Strategies of Containment (1945–1947)” further explores how workers were radicalized by analyzing a number of wildcat strikes. After March 1945, the Romanian Communist Party faced the challenging task of expanding its ranks by attracting new members from working class constituencies alongside managing a collapsing economy, mass displacement, famine and other social consequences of the war. This chapter asks how the party managed to appeal to the workers while at the same time suppressing strikes and silencing wage demands and looks closely at the role factory committees, quotidian violence and revolutionary language played in the communist party’s pursuit of industrial peace.

Chapter III “The Monetarized Everyday (1947–1949)” covers the crucial years between the currency reform of August 1947 and the first comprehensive wage reform of February 1949. This period effectively marked the transition out of the war economy and the immediate postwar collapse and brought about the first concerted steps towards recovering and overcoming pre-war productivity levels. In the realm of labor relations, the period saw a swift overturning of many of the industrial policies inherited from the war economy as well as of those enacted shortly after March 1945. This chapter examines a set of reforms that aimed to restore the value of cash money for industrial workers and consequently recreate a monetarized everyday that would allow factory managers and central planners to adequately factor in the value of wages and investments.

Chapter IV “People’s Capital (1948–1956)” tackles the issue of managerial authority in the context of “nationalization” i.e. the transfer of ownership rights from private individuals and corporate persons to the Romanian state. Beginning in September 1944, factory hierarchy had been constantly tested and significantly weakened, not merely as a consequence of purges, strikes and revolts, but also due to the expansion of the communist party at the factory level, where communist activists would often find themselves competing with and hence challenging the decisions of management, engineers and workshop supervisors. This chapter examines the personal trajectories of the new managers appointed after 1948 as they tried to secure and reinforce their authority.

Chapter V “The Politics of Productivity (1950–1958)” explores the unfolding of productivity campaigns during the 1950s at the juncture of two interlocking social processes: the rationalization of the labor process and austerity. Against historiographical interpretations that view the decade as one of “forced industrialization”, this chapter argues for an understanding of the 1950s as a period in which rationalization and austerity structured both the options available to pol-

icy-makers and the experience of industrial work. The decade, I argue, was one during which depressed living standards, high wage dispersion and a relatively cheap labor force allowed the government to pursue economic growth.

Chapter I

1 Reassembling Labor Relations on the Homefront (1941–1945)

1.1 Visible Consensus

“November 7 1944: the day of the Russian Revolution. I cancelled out the work-day because workers would have left their factories anyway; they now put the Russian celebrations before our very own”, General Sănătescu jotted down in his diary.¹ The note summed up Sănătescu’s bitter experience as head of the new Romanian government convened in late August 1944: between September and November, workers in Bucharest regularly abandoned their workplaces, flooded the city and pushed for a change of government. If workers mobbed the streets, squares and stadiums of Bucharest, the General inferred, this was due to fear, the primary feeling triggered by the threats that communists perpetrated on the shop floors. The banners that the workers paraded with reminded Sănătescu of the Moscow he briefly visited in the fall of 1940, while leading the Romanian delegation entrusted to negotiate the Eastern border settlement with the Soviet Union. General Sănătescu’s gaze, however, neither breached factory walls, nor did it pay close attention to the range of slogans workers took to their public gatherings. For it is highly doubtful that in the Red Square of 1940, amidst glorifying words to Stalin, one might have dared flaunt a placard asking for higher wages.

Less visible to the prime-minister’s eye were also public institutions such as the Bucharest Labor Inspectorate, around which workers, apprentices and private functionaries clustered *en masse* on a daily basis. There, an overburdened office clerk noted with some relief in late October 1944 that employees finally accepted to limit their claims to “professional demands” which eased considerably the mediation of labor conflicts the Inspectorate was obliged to undertake.² Hidden from sight behind factory walls, as one foreman from Malaxa Works recalled, in late 1944 “life was on fire”.³ A memo printed by the employers’ organization U.G.I.R. in October 1944 concurred: “Industries today are assaulted by

1 Simona Ghițescu-Sănătescu (ed.), *Jurnalul Generalului Sănătescu*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 179.

2 ANR, MM, 1081/1943, p. 489.

3 Alexandru Săsăreanu, “Noi muncim, vedem ce-o fi...”, in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile orașului. Istorii de viață în București. Secolul XX* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 325.



Image 1: *Street demonstration, Bucharest, September 24, 1944; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 110/1944*

myriad demands formulated by factory committees that organized themselves everywhere.”⁴ U.G.I.R. ended its call by urging the government to legislate the formation of an all-encompassing national trade-union that could be negotiated with and that might, as a result, help keep in check those “overzealous elements” among the workers that disturbed, through unreasonable demands, the industrial peace that benefited all: the state, wage earners and business.

U.G.I.R.’s public statement was issued in the context of the mushrooming of factory committees across the whole of industry and the subsequent revival of local trade-unions in late 1944. As such, the memo purported to make visible the outline of a possible consensus on the limits of collective bargaining and wage policy. The call for a trade-union law, for example, resonated with the debates carried out within Sănătescu’s cabinet while the emphasis on “overzealous elements” advancing overblown requests mirrored the immediate concerns leaders of the Communist Party expressed on the travails of unionization. “Another important phenomenon is the radicalization of the masses” Constantin Pârâvulescu noted in his report on the state of trade-unions in late September 1944. “Our

⁴ “Memoriul U.G.I.R. adresat Guvernului [U.G.I.R.’s Memo to the Government]”, *Curierul Uniunii Generale a Industriașilor din România*, No. 15, October 1944, p. 1. U.G.I.R. stands for The General Union of Romanian Industrialists.

party's catchwords – he went on to conclude – are widely accepted by the popular masses, but they often prove insufficient. We have to struggle against the demagogy and the 'revolutionary' phraseology used by the social-democrats to deceive the working masses and lure them in their party."⁵

Finally, U.G.I.R.'s reference to the rule of law might have appealed to the institutional routine of the labor inspectorates, now faced with the task of screening out "professional demands" from the otherwise bewildering lists of claims put forward by factory committees. More importantly, however, it evoked the parallel attempts of the General Commissariat for Prices to retain its legal attribute to plan industrial wages in order to prevent an inflationary snowball effect. Policy papers circulated between various ministries and the National Bank in the fall of 1944 warned about giving in to wage increases and called upon trade-unions to rally behind the state's effort to freeze salaries: "rulers and ruled, everybody must support the government of the country and the state authorities in the thrust to solve our most fundamental problems: preserving the state's being (*fiin-ța statului*) and avoiding the collapse of the economy and of the public administration."⁶

In order to understand how the experience of the Second World War structured the emergence of workers' radicalism in late 1944, this chapter explores the ways in which labor relations were reassembled on the home-front between late 1940 and early 1945. The dismemberment of organized labor during the war enhanced the role of the state bureaucracy in mediating labor disputes and reinforced paternalistic forms of workers' representation. The first four years of the war saw workers' delegates submitting petitions to the Ministry of Labor, seeking out legal counseling from the Labor Chambers and even benefiting from the verdicts ruled by Arbitrage Commissions. Moreover, the wage policy formulated between 1942 and 1945 across industries laid the groundwork for the postwar governments' approach to wage freezes, sectoral wage scales, wage differentials and the type of benefits covered by the social wage. It is against this background that I locate the reemergence of unionization and the ensuing upsurge in labor unrest that momentarily challenged the established pattern of determining wage policies and restructured collective bargaining after September 1944.

This chapter also takes up the issue of workers' everyday politics during the war by focusing on action situations and social spaces that occasioned expressions of discontent over wartime working and living conditions.⁷ It is only

⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 114/1944, p. 44.

⁶ BNR, Fond Studii, 1/1945, p. 233.

⁷ For the notion of "action situations" see William M. Reddy, "The Logic of Action: Indeterminacy, Emotion, and Historical Narrative", *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, 2001, 14–32.



Image 2: *Bucharest citizens welcoming the Red Army, August 29, 1944; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 28/1944*

through a close reading of the inherent ambivalence of workers' grievances that we can map out the culturally and politically distant, seemingly alien working-class social universe. Gendered violence, trivial shop floor rivalries, humiliation, respectability, occasional outbursts of joy and passing gestures of solidarity were all part of locally embedded vernaculars of everyday struggle through which the small stakes of factory work were articulated. The reemergence of organized labor in late 1944, I claim, revealed the extent to which militant practices came to rely on the embodied experiences of work hierarchy and subjection at the point of production. But while factory committees and union leaders could draw on accumulated adverse feelings towards management and military commanders, workers' allegiance proved difficult to secure.

Finally, I end the chapter by addressing two expressions of workers' radicalism: the purging of military commanders and allegedly compromised factory managers that took place in Reșița in early January 1945 and the violent elections for the factory committee held at Malaxa Works in late February 1945 on the secluded industrial outskirts of Bucharest. The aim of this last section of the chapter is to show how the intensification of feelings within the narrow confines of the industrial plant tended to coagulate not just in moments of collective action, but also in willed apathy and other exercises in self-restraint on the shopfloor.

1.2 Varieties of Paternalism

The industrial complex that engineer Nicolae Malaxa erected in the Eastern district of Bucharest was rightly perceived as something of a wonder. It quadrupled its workforce between 1936 and 1938, expanded and diversified its production in the last two years of that decade and reached an impressive contingent of roughly 11000 employees in early 1941.⁸ The engineer himself was a controversial figure: a captain of industry whose extraordinary trajectory during the 1930s was associated with corruption scandals, murky state sponsorships and political networking at the very top. On the eve of the war, Malaxa's factories manufactured drilling machines for the national oil industry, locomotives for the state railway company (CFR) and a vast array of weaponry for the Romanian Army. The plant, much like Malaxa's public persona, deeply fascinated engineers, journalists, writers and politicians. Its industrial architecture mesmerized even the incredulous: "[...] offices are located at one end of the foundry section. The hall itself is so high that office desks are layered on three floors. The wall that separates them is made entirely out of glass so that engineers can supervise workers at all times."⁹ Showcased at various continental industrial expositions in late 1930s, the plant nurtured the sentiment – as one of its employees recalled – that Romanians have finally “entered Europe as industrialists.”¹⁰

The enchantment with the plant, however, seldom filtered down to the shop-floors during the boom period. Between January 1938 and October 1940, the workday was often stretched well beyond the 8-hour legal norm, overtime was rarely if ever remunerated, Sunday work became customary and the right to paid holidays melted into thin air. These harsh working conditions were finally brought before the Arbitrage Commission in 1942 when over 2000 workers were granted compensatory pay.¹¹ But why did workers' demands for retroactive wage calculation stop in October 1940? Documents generated around this labor dispute provide no clues to an answer. Neither the workers' petition, nor the files of the labor inspectors and not even the final report issued by the accountant who reviewed the payrolls give any indication to this effect. And yet, the date

⁸ “Uzinele Malaxa”, *Natura. Revistă pentru raspândirea științei*, XXVIII, No. 7, July 15 1939, 314–315; Ion Gancea “Din istoricul uzinelor ‘23 august’”, *Studii. Revistă de istorie*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1967, 743–764.

⁹ M. Dragomir, “Uzinele Malaxa”, *Gazeta municipală*, X, No. 462, March 9 1941.

¹⁰ Engineer Henry Holban quoted in Costin Diaconescu (ed.) *Uzinele Malaxa – 23 August – Faur. Un arc peste timp: 1921–1999* (Bucharest: CD Press, 2007), 26.

¹¹ ANR, MM, 780/1942, pp. 2–202.

marked a crucial moment in the transformation of wage policy and collective bargaining across the Romanian manufacturing sector.

The Legionary Movement's accession to government positions in late 1940 turned industrial milieux into key sites of recruitment and self-promotion. Shortly after the proclamation of the National Legionary State in September 1940, the leader of the Legionary Movement, Horia Sima, visited Nicolae Malaxa's factory office to "negotiate with him a number of demands his workers had formulated."¹² Accompanied by a legionary delegation that professed to represent all employees, Sima convinced an apparently reluctant Malaxa to accept wage increases. He then toured the plant to be acclaimed by the workers themselves who were quickly informed about their new wages: "it was the first victory the Romanian working class won without strikes and other disorders."¹³ Sima's memoirs contain several such episodes: in early October he doubled wages at a mining company in Southern Transylvania; later that month Sima readily accepted an 8–12% raise demanded by a group of miners from Petroșani, allegedly to avoid a strike. Sima's interventions were unprecedented in Romanian industry and must have shocked engineer Malaxa. The last attempt of workers at his plant to engage in collective bargaining under the more traditional form of unionization dated back to 1936 and was abruptly halted by arrests and lay-offs.¹⁴

During the political climate of late 1940, managers found it increasingly difficult to resist wage concessions, particularly in large-scale factories. Nicolae Malaxa, however, was quick to adapt. On October 4, 1940, UDR's metalworkers downed tools and called in a strike. Two days earlier, UDR's mining division had been seized by a wave of strikes as miners demanded a renegotiation of the collective labor contract, higher wages and better provisioning. Consequently, UDR's Bucharest Headquarters decided to send a delegation in order to appease what threatened to turn into a general strike. Picked by Malaxa himself, the members of the delegation descended upon Reșița in legionary uniform, rounded up workers' delegates and announced the doubling of wages for daily workers, an increase of the "expensiveness bonus" (*adaos de scumpete*) for all employees, a reduction in working hours and the removal of two local engineers suspected of opposing the Movement.¹⁵ The event astounded Reșița's

¹² Horia Sima, *Era libertății. Statul Național Legionar* (Timișoara : Editura Gordian, 1995), Vol. I, 203.

¹³ IBIDEM.

¹⁴ Simion Rusu, "Mișcarea muncitorilor metalurgiști dela fabrica Malaxa", *Lumea Nouă*, XXX, No. 30, July 26 1936.

¹⁵ One of the members of the delegation, engineer Petre Bârsu, left a detailed account, see ANR, UDR, 32/1941, pp. 5–8.

local managerial team to such a degree that in February 1941 the newly appointed Military Commander of UDR – Colonel Boitan – described it as a “quasi Soviet” affair.¹⁶

There is little doubt that higher wages brought some relief for thousands of metalworkers and miners in Bucharest and Reșița. But one would be hard pressed to read the new payrolls as evidence of straightforward allegiance or even sympathy for the Legionary Movement. Wage concessions happened in a force-field defined by factory hierarchy, conflictual political loyalties, ethnic tensions, and gender relations. Workers themselves had their own politics. The mapping of this force-field, therefore, requires social context and a taste of the thickness of the everyday in which workers’ politics took place.¹⁷ The October 4 strike in Reșița was reportedly declared by socialists only to be suppressed, two hours later, with the help of legionary and national-socialist workers. The Bucharest delegation, however, invited three representatives from each of these political camps to break the good news. The meeting itself was held in the Workers’ House, a large building inaugurated in February 1936, owned by UDR’s metalworkers as shareholders and run on the basis of an *Aktiengesellschaft*. The House’s main hall accommodated 888 seats, an oblique hint to the local history of struggle for an equitable division of the day into 8 hours of work, 8 of leisure and 8 of rest.¹⁸ The workers’ representatives were so-called “men of trust” (*bărbăți de încredere*): a group of quintessential workers elected by each section of the plant and approved by management. The typical “man of trust” had to be male, skilled, married, senior, settled in the town, “always honest and cordial” even when his political views were not shared by his workmates.¹⁹ This more or less informal structure of representation was the pillar of UDR’s paternalism: it cut across trade-union membership, party affiliation and ethnic fault lines to

16 ANR, MM, 282/1941, p. 147.

17 For the injunction to grasp the thickness of the social context in which resistance, or its lack thereof, takes place, see Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographical Refusal”, in her *Anthropology and Social Theory. Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

18 Hans Wania, Franz Konrad Schlotter, “Das Arbeiterheim in Reschitz. Entstehung, Bedeutung, Erinnerungen”, *Banater Berglanddeutsche*, 18, Vol. 107, 2002. The symbolism of the Workers’ House is also mentioned by Dan D. Farcaș, *Hoinărint prin Reșița pierdută* (Reșița: TIM, 2008), 21–22.

19 Description offered by Anton Ferenschütz, *Wahn und Wirklichkeit. Erzählung* (Reșița: Verlag Banatul Montan, 2006), 95. On the notion of the “quintessential worker”, see Sonya O. Rose, “Class Formation and the Quintessential Worker”, in John R. Hall (ed.) *Reworking Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 133–166.

provide management with a representative, authoritative and legitimate partner for discussing collective labor contracts, wage claims and shopfloor discipline.

The political identities of the “men of trust” were already in flux in Reșița and became even more fluid after the banning of the guilds in November 1940. Introduced in late 1938, guilds had been professional corporate bodies that severely restricted trade-union rights but retained their entitlement to pursue collective bargaining and accumulate patrimony.²⁰ The last elections for the Metalworkers Guild in Reșița, held in March 1940, were won by socialist workers. Out of a total of 25, no less than 13 new members of the Executive Committee were already under police surveillance for their long standing involvement with the left movement.²¹ Take, for instance, the case of Ioan Haudek, an ethnic German worker whom police records described as “ardently communist, intelligent and trusted by the masses.”²² During the late 1930s, Haudek had been the secretary of the local branch of the Social-Democratic Party, a “man of trust” and one of the more influential top members of the Metalworkers Guild. In the aftermath of the October 4 strike he was briefly arrested by the legionary police following a major crackdown on Reșița’s socialist workers. Upon his release, Haudek joined the German Ethnic Group (GEG), and was soon thereafter appointed leader of the Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens (DAR) and entrusted to represent the national-socialist workers before UDR’s management. During Haudek’s tenure, DAR gained control of the Workers’ House by imposing itself as the natural heir of the guild’s assets under the justification that the majority of its shareholders were ethnically German.²³

Haudek’s biography was far from exceptional. We might get a better sense of the claustrophobic context in which political allegiances shifted among Reșița’s “men of trust” from Anton Breitenhofer’s autobiographical fiction *Der Fünfzehnte*.²⁴ There is no evidence that Breitenhofer – a lathe operator in his 20s at the time – was ever a “man of trust”, though he numbered himself among the 13 socialist workers elected to the Executive Committee of the Metalworkers Guild in March 1940. *Der Fünfzehnte* tells the story of Wilhelm, an ethnic

20 Eftimie Gherman, “Conducătorii muncitorilor au cuvântul. Efectele legii breslelor”, *Lumea Nouă*, XXXII, No. 18, April 30 1939.

21 ANR, Fond 50, 3080, pp. 3–6.

22 IBIDEM, p. 5.

23 ANCS, PSD Caraș, 1/1944, pp. 105–106. This biographical note is authored by an anonymous fellow social-democrat in May 1945 and ends in regret: “we expected him not to join or at least not to take up leading positions.” Ioan Haudek was deported to the Soviet Union in January 1945.

24 Anton Breitenhofer, “Der Fünfzehnte”, *Banater Schrifttum*, No. 2, 1954, 5–15.

German worker at UDR's rolling mill. More interested in family matters than politics, Wilhelm was appointed "man of trust" by his colleagues in early 1940. In the fall of that year, he was summoned at the Workers' House to take part in a meeting of the "men of trust". Two police officers were seated in the back of the room, quietly jotting down the names of the workers as they arrived. The meeting was presided over by Cojocarú – a man Wilhelm knew intimately, a trusted senior with whom he used to read newspapers, buy books from and confide in. Wilhelm could not quite believe his ears as he heard Cojocarú explain that with Poland and France conquered, Russia stood no chance and the future belonged to Germany. The thirty "men of trust" present in the room had to choose their sides once and for all, vote their agreement by hand raising and return straight home to their families. Cojocarú first invited ethnically Romanian workers to join the Legionary Movement and then asked the Germans to do the same for DAR. One worker, who accused Cojocarú of enforcing terror, was immediately arrested by the police and swiftly removed from the room. The voting continued. Flabbergasted by Cojocarú's metamorphosis, Wilhelm decided to keep aloof. Remaining neutral, however, was hardly an option amidst staring eyes, and little did it matter whether colleagues glare at you in anger, resignation or hope. Wilhelm's arm, the fifteenth, had to be lifted.

Der Fünfzehnte recounts an episode of political *résistance* to peer pressure at the end of which the hero discovers that anti-fascists and communists were bound to share the same prison cell. It is completely inconceivable that a scene such as this could have taken place at Malaxa Works in Bucharest in late 1940. The institution of the "men of trust", the close-knit space of the Workers' House, and the recent past of guild membership were all absent. The diverging history of these two industrial plants during the 1930s is still visible today in the sort of archival material that each left behind. The content of factory archives depends to a very large degree on the manner in which management conceives of its employees. In other words, the range of documents compiled and preserved within factories is necessarily related to managerial strategies devised to (re)produce the workforce.²⁵ The anatomy of the factory archive is thus a hint to the type of paternalism that shaped it. From this perspective, the social role assumed by Malaxa Works in reproducing its workers outside the plant over the interwar period seems feeble indeed. The great bulk of its archive runs from the late 1920s up to 1949 and is composed of papers covering mostly juridical, technical and

²⁵ I draw here on Alain Touraine's analysis of the Renault Archives in his correspondence with Charles Braibant, director of the French National Archives in *L'évolution du travail ouvrier aux Usines Renault* (Paris: CNRS, 1955), 184–185.

commercial aspects. Unlike UDR's archives for the same period, there is no trace of collective labor contracts having been discussed with workers' delegates. Moreover, whereas for the case of Reșița I found myself parsing through piles of dossiers pertaining to pension funds, the standard of living, food provisioning, commuting subsidies, marriage bonuses, credit and housing issues, Malaxa Works' archives display a remarkable paucity of information on the mundane lives of its workers.²⁶ War time destruction and the archival processing practices of the socialist state alone do not explain the stark contrast between Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița – arguably the two largest factory archives available in Romania for the first half of the twentieth century: this difference is to be explained by their paternalist managerial regimes.

Historians tend to agree that paternalism unfolded as a cluster of policies set in place in response to labor shortages. These managerial strategies aimed to ease workers' exclusive reliance on cash wages, secure their stability and reinforce their commitment to the company.²⁷ However, similarly to other family-owned firms and unlike joint-stock companies such as UDR, the role of the *patron* was paramount at Malaxa Works. In this sense, engineer Malaxa's presence in factory life was comparable to that of the owners of medium sized companies in Romania, particularly in the textile and footwear industries.²⁸ Furthermore, personnel records and oral testimonies confirm that a significant number of workers, notably among the highly skilled, were recruited from across the country and had to be supported to settle in Bucharest.²⁹ Factory welfare institutions were therefore not totally absent. *Uzinele Malaxa*, a short documentary from late 1939, captured on film the medical cabinet of the plant and other facilities such

26 The first collective labor contract between UDR and its organized metalworkers was signed in 1921; see Georg Hromadka, *Kleine Chronik des Banater Berglands* (München: Verlag Südost-deutsches Kulturwerk, 1993), 85–86.

27 The scholarly literature on paternalism is vast. For paternalism as a response to workers' evasion (*dérobade*) in French metallurgy, see Gérard Noiriel, "Du 'patronage' au 'paternalisme'. La restructuration des formes de domination de la main-d'œuvre ouvrière dans l'industrie métallurgique française", in his *État, nation et immigration. Vers une histoire du pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 248–265. For factory welfare (*freiwillige soziale Leistungen*) in German heavy industry, see Rüdiger Hachtmann, "Beschäftigungslage und Lohnentwicklung in der Deutschen Metallindustrie 1933–1949", *Historische Sozialforschung*, No. 19, 1981, 42–68. The best literary treatment of the topic remains Jean-Paul Goux's *Mémoires de l'enclave. Récits d'industrie* (Paris : Actes Sud, 2003).

28 For example, as late as 1943, in Bucharest's largest footwear factory women workers would customarily address Dumitru Mociorniță, the owner, as follows: "Dear Mr. Father [părinte] Mociorniță" or "Father, I remain your faithful servant [servitor]", see AMB, Fabrica Dumitru Mociorniță, 26/1943, pp. 1–2.

29 AMB, Fondul S.A.R. Malaxa, 16/1937, 17/1937.

as shower cabins freely offered to employees.³⁰ Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that engineer Malaxa financed the building of an orthodox parish as well. But paternalism cannot be reduced to social control and the planned reproduction of labor power. In large scale metal industries, as Donald Reid put it, “paternalist management involved control of the discretionary powers exercised by shopfloor supervisors.”³¹ Indeed, the legionary delegation dispatched to Reșița to contain the strikes of early October 1940, arrived with wage bonuses already set in Bucharest “in Mr. Malaxa’s own office.” UDR’s local management traditionally upgraded wages on the basis of the fluctuation of local prices, which they monitored through “mixed commissions” formed by technical supervisors and “men of trust”. Moreover, workers’ delegates in Reșița often forced their own calculations of the standard of living on management during negotiations over collective labor contracts.

If Malaxa Works’ archives contain no protocols on subsidies, benefits and the other welfare facilities it provided, this might be because such issues were not subjected to collective bargaining and remained solely in the realm of patronage and occasional philanthropy i.e. a mere offshoot of managerial planning rather than the outcome of power-sharing along the lines of factory hierarchy. Engineer Malaxa’s discretionary power was checked neither by an informal arrangement of workers’ representation, nor by organized labor under the guild system and not even by the rulings of the Board of Administrators, the members of which were anyway appointed by the patron himself. Factory hierarchy had a different dynamic at Malaxa Works as it spiraled downwards, unencumbered, from the main office. It is this well-oiled chain of command that moulded shop floor supervision and provided the density of the social context in which workers’ political identities shifted under the National Legionary State.

Malaxa Works was well known to police agents for encouraging the presence among its employees of a group of engineers, foremen and skilled workers associated with the Legionary Workers’ Corps (CML).³² It seems likely, as Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu noted at the time, that engineer Malaxa used the CML for gathering shopfloor information on subversive, nay socialist and communist workers that

³⁰ *Uzinele Malaxa* (1940: ONC, directed by Paul Călinescu).

³¹ Donald Reid, “Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1985, 584.

³² ANR, MI, Diverse, 7/1937. For more on CML see Oliver Jens Schmitt, “‘Zum Kampf, Arbeiter’ – Arbeiterfrage und Arbeiterschaft in der Legionärsbewegung (1919–1938)”, in Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt (eds.) *Insenzierte Gegenmacht von rechts. Die “Legion Erzengel Michael” in Rumänien 1918–1938* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013), notably 330–360 for Schmitt’s valuable discussion of “klassenkämpferischen Faschismus”.

might have attempted to organize themselves during the late 1930s.³³ Pătrășcanu – a contemporary Marxist intellectual and communist party member – made this observation under the distress of having witnessed dozens of forgers, mechanics, lathe operators and welders from Malaxa Works taking part in the armed rebellion and the pogrom of January 1941. During those days, the plant stopped production as some of its skilled workers took to the streets of Bucharest to fight the army and loot Jewish neighborhoods.³⁴ Even though details on individual workers who participated in the rebellion are difficult to amass, the fact that Malaxa Works become a stronghold of CML in the fall of 1940 is beyond doubt.

It was the workshop overseer (*șef de atelier*) who played the main role of recruiting agent for the Legionary Movement at Malaxa Works. Structured by factory hierarchy, the shop floor allowed none of the mock plebiscitary atmosphere UDR's "men of trust" had to go through in the meeting room of the Workers' House. The higher one was within the factory hierarchy, the harder it became to refuse enlisting. In the words of a worker: "Then a nasty shop floor supervisor came, I don't remember his name, and forced us to join. But I did not join. They caught Damian, who was a foreman (*maistru*), and he was afraid that they would fire him as a foreman, and they grabbed him. And he became a legionary, but I stayed out. They assigned me crappy tasks, to take out the iron from underneath the benches, to put it all back, and then they would ask me why I don't join. I told them my father was not involved in politics, I don't do politics, and things settled; they left me out."³⁵ Invitations to join the Legionary Movement came from above and were wontedly issued in the bossy tone of an injunction. Stand-offish behavior backed by claims to neutrality was rare, especially among workers with a personal history of militancy. Petru, a locksmith employed by Malaxa Rolling Pipes Factory in 1938, described his experience in the following way: "In 1940 when the legionaries came to power headed by Antonescu, I remember that everybody enrolled in the Legion. I myself was repeatedly teased (*bâzâit*) to do so. I was at the time talking with comrade Boris Musurschi, whom I knew to be a

33 Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* (Bucharest: FORUM, 1945), 202.

34 I was unable to find eyewitness accounts of this event as it unfolded inside Malaxa Works. One report forwarded to the police in February 1941 by two of the plant's engineers was strangely missing from its dossier, ANR, MI, Diverse 30/1933, p. 115. For instance, one engineer dressed in military garb took out a tank from the factory and drove it to the city, ANR, MI, Diverse, 77/1941, p. 159.

35 Alexandru Săsăreanu, "Noi muncim, vedem ce-o fi..." in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile orașului. Istorii de viață în București. Secolul XX* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 323.

man devoted to the working class, and he told me to join, and we did so together.”³⁶

To question whether Boris, a man with communist sympathies, acted on discarded faith or out of principled opportunism would trivialize the ambiguous violence, physical and symbolic, constitutive of factory hierarchy. In early 1948, a newspaper reporter who visited the Rolling Pipes Factory learned of a man suffering from heart problems who disregarded the doctor’s advice to take time off. It was Musurschi: “I could not stay home; I could not allow myself not to see how the machine works.”³⁷ The article presented a short biography of this working-class hero: “comrade Boris suffered a lot but he always stayed put. A member of the communist party in 1941, he was arrested in 1943 and sent to the internment camp. He returned to Malaxa Works after his release and actively contributed to keeping the factory afloat. He became a foreman, and he now works hard to promote new cadres among the workers. This intense activity ruined his health.”³⁸ The details of this résumé blur historical causality by inserting bodily illness into a structuring narrative of grand political transformation and everyday personal *résistance*. Party archives, however, show that Boris was not a member of the communist party in 1941. He was arrested in 1943 simply because he had spoken with a communist agitator nicknamed Titu.³⁹ Moreover, Boris was foreman of the Rolling Pipes Factory well before his imprisonment, possibly as early as 1940 and regained his position immediately after prison release in August 1944, in addition to becoming secretary of the factory committee. Just like the other foremen employed at the Rolling Pipes Factory, Boris was in the habit of using “command methods [...] before and after August 23”, often beating up subordinate workers even when they shared his political views.⁴⁰ Expelled from the communist party in 1949, comrade Musurschi not only retained his job but received praise in the factory gazette for quality work.⁴¹ Workers’ shifting involvements under the successive dictatorial regimes

36 ANCS, Comitetul județean PMR Reșița, 12/1949, p. 59. Petru was recruited from Reșița in 1938 together with a team of skilled metalworkers to be employed at Malaxa’s newly opened Rolling Pipes Factory.

37 Paul Fayon, “Producția noastră, mândria noastră”, *Revista muncii*, III, No. 26, March 20, 1948, 20–22.

38 IBIDEM.

39 AMB, PCR București, 4/1945, p. 7. Titu was the nickname of Alexandru Șiperco. I make use of his recollections below.

40 ANR, Comisia Centrală de Verificare a Membrilor de Partid, 35/1949, p. 123.

41 *Viața Uzinei, Organ al Comitetului de Partid și al Comitetului Sindical – Uzinele “23 August”*, I, No. 3, June 1 1949, p. 4.

of mid-twentieth century Romania, therefore, cannot be detached from the embodied history of work hierarchies.

1.3 Wages of War

The defeat of the Legionary Movement in late January 1941 and its subsequent outlawing led to the establishment of a military dictatorship under the leadership of Ion Antonescu. Political and labor organizations remained banned, save for the German Ethnic Group and the Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens, both of which could freely enroll the German minority, collect membership fees and legally represent their constituency in various instances of civil life. In February 1941, more than half of the Romanian industry was militarized and redeployed in the service of the war, often as part of Germany's war economy. Malaxa Works, for instance, was taken over by the state, nationalized and rented out to a joint-stock company by the name of ROGIFER. The militarization of factory life entailed a significant transformation of workers' routines. High-ranked military officers were appointed commanders for each factory in order to enforce discipline and set up surveillance networks on the shopfloors. Deemed "soldiers of the home-front", workers were now required to wear arm badges for easy identification, and were always liable to be sent to the front if they misbehaved. Strolling, daydreaming and chatting during worktime were considered grave offences.⁴² Factory gates were guarded by gendarmes, factory surroundings patrolled by police agents and working-class neighborhoods planted with informants. Militarization was followed in October 1941 by a law that placed factory work under exceptional conditions and stipulated the institutional framework through which labor disputes could be pursued.⁴³

Throughout 1941, however, the militarization of factory life neither affected factories' prerogatives to devise their own wage policy, nor did it alter the language of industrial peace inherited from the Legionary Movement. Romania's entry in the Second World War was explained by the editor-in-chief of the Labor Ministry's official magazine as a campaign waged against "Soviet state capitalism": "Minimal wages, paid holidays, 8 hour workday etc. etc. are just the beginning of this new epoch, whereby the state provides excellent conditions

⁴² For a sample of the military rules at UDR, see Ovidiu Bozu, "Măsuri represive adoptate împotriva muncitorilor în perioada militarizării Uzinelor Reșița", *Banatica*, 1975, 277–282. For ROGIFER, see AMB, *Legiunea de Jandarmi București, 1932–1949*, 64/1941.

⁴³ Law No. 864, published in MO, CIX, No. 233, October 2 1941, 5836–5940.

for work, which would have never been possible under the free relation between capital and labor or under the slavery of Judaic Marxism.”⁴⁴ Propaganda aside, the outset of the war did increase the role of the bureaucracy in regulating working conditions, setting wages and mediating labor conflicts. But rather than marking a clear break with the past, the protracted emergence of the wartime labor regime had to rely on established varieties of paternalism, lobbying, and the conflictual interplay between the institutions called upon to coordinate industrial production. Yet it was this fragile and contradictory wartime labor regime that came to structure collective bargaining during the whole of the 1940s. The core parameters of the wage policy arrived at between 1942 and 1944 in metalworking industries laid the groundwork for the postwar governments’ approach to wage freezes, sectoral wage scales, wage differentials and the type of benefits covered by the social wage.

In January 1941, UDR’s ethnic German “men of trust” addressed management in the name of all the metalworkers enrolled in DAR, revoked the collective labor contract and asked for an increase of their wages by 37.59%. Valid for one year, UDR’s collective labor contract could be revoked or “denounced” by workers’ representatives two months before it expired, a gesture that effectively signaled the beginning of a complex process of negotiation over wages and the array of benefits, bonuses and subsidies to be included in the agreement. The percentage might seem striking, but it represented the standard of living calculated by the “men of trust” themselves for a family of four on the basis of the evolution of prices for primary goods, including footwear and clothing items, on Reșița’ local market. The negotiations, which could last for weeks in a row, required the presence of a labor inspector, often travelling on request from the nearby city of Timișoara. The whole process ended with a new contract being signed by the three parties involved and sanctioned by Timișoara’s Arbitrage Commission. In February 1941, miners’ ethnic German “men of trust” also revoked their own collective contract. Paid lower by company tradition, miners joined the negotiations to demand their wages reach the same level as that of the metalworkers. The most precarious group of workers, some 4000 woodsmen, seasonal lumberjacks and sawmill operators active on UDR’s countywide forestry domains were not employed on the basis of a collective labor contract, had no representatives and were excluded from negotiations. Their relation to the com-

44 Nicu Porsenna, “Capitalist, muncitor și stat”, *Muncitorul național român*, No. 1, June, 1941.

pany, as one local social-democrat activist recalled, was reduced to one between master and servant (*slugă*).⁴⁵

Negotiations proceeded at a slow pace. Fearing reprisal for their involvement with the Legionary Movement, ethnic Romanian “men of trust” initially avoided voicing their own claims. Management, however, encouraged the election of three Romanian delegates according to the “old norms”, and postponed negotiations until late February.⁴⁶ By April that year, management agreed to a wage increase of 25% for metalworks and 10% for miners and accepted a clause that allowed workers to demand new wage bonuses every four months. Following a protest staged by the miners’ wives in Anina, management also conceded to include in the contract its obligation to buy pigs and supply miners with the bedrock of their daily diet, the expensive pork fat. Metalworkers’ “men of trust” were granted supervisory powers over the hiring process and the right to participate in the commission that distributed lodging facilities to employees in the town.⁴⁷ In August 1941, as prices kept surging during the early summer, workers’ delegates requested yet another 10% increase of their wages to compensate for the sudden drop in the living standard. This time around, management resorted to lobbying the Labor Ministry in order to prolong the intervention of the labor inspector from Timișoara as much as possible. They also asked for the standard of living to be revised for “times of scarcity” and be periodically recalculated directly by the Ministry, rather than at the factory level, a demand that preceded what became official state policy in October 1941, by a couple of weeks.⁴⁸

UDR’s management was thus very likely knocking on an open door. By the fall of 1941 the Ministry of Labor, the General Commissariat for Prices and the Ministry of the National Economy were all busy looking for ways to stabilize wages. The “men of trust” soon found out the hard way that their wages were no longer up for negotiation. When the collective labor contract was revoked in January 1942, workers’ delegates obtained a favorable ruling from the Arbitrage Commission for a 10% wage increase and even convinced the labor inspector to threaten management with sabotage if the verdict was disregarded. Backed by the Ministry of the National Economy, UDR’s management took the legal dispute to the Supreme Arbitrage Commission in Bucharest which overruled the decision and made clear that only the General Commissariat for Prices had the

⁴⁵ Traian Cercega quoted in Eusebiu-Marcel Narai, *Situația politică, economică și socială a județelor Caraș și Severin, August 1944-Iunie 1948* (PhD Dissertation, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Vol. I, 2007), 260.

⁴⁶ ANR, MM, 73/1941, p. 133.

⁴⁷ ANR, UDR, 101/1941, pp. 6–15.

⁴⁸ ANR, UDR, 145/1941, pp. 1–66.

right to set industrial wages. The support of the labor inspector and the conflictual overlap between the regional Arbitrage Commission and the General Commissariat for Prices left some room for maneuver and kept hopes alive. In July 1942 the “men of trust” expressed their intention to resign because workers accused them of having given up their duties as representatives. This desperate move paid off and wage bonuses were finally annexed to the contract, as the Military Commander quickly acknowledged, because the company could not afford to have the authority of the “men of trust” undermined. However, this was the last time wages were upgraded collectively at the factory level through contentious negotiations.

The year 1942 saw factories deprived of control over wage policy. Wages were now set by a central state agency – the General Commissariat for Prices – which regularly issued minimum and maximum quotas for each industry. The Commissariat parceled the national territory in three distinct “wage regions” (*regiuni de salarizare*) according to their estimated cost of living. The first region grouped major urban centers such as Bucharest, Braşov, Ploieşti and Timişoara and had the highest wages; the second region combined smaller cities and industrial localities – Arad, Petroşani, Reşita, and Hunedoara – where wages were lower by an average of 10%; the lowest industrial wages were reserved for those regions regarded as rural. This wage scale was then segmented by skill, gender and age. To a certain extent this scheme drew upon the way in which the interwar Romanian state had customarily paid its public functionaries, but it was also grounded in a renewed effort to make sovereign space legible along the lines of a simplified view of proletarianization.⁴⁹ The Commissariat classified industrial workers in relation to their proximity and access to land.⁵⁰ In this view, urban dwellers had to rely solely on their wages for survival, whereas the industrialized peasants could compensate for lower pay with the agricultural products of their own plots. For the same reason, markets in food items could be expected to be cheaper outside large cities.

Location in the villages, however, did not necessarily make workers less dependent on cash wages, as the legibility principle of the “wage regions” as-

⁴⁹ Legibility and simplification should be understood here as categories of bureaucratic practice, James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 11–52.

⁵⁰ The General Commissariat for Prices’s assumptions about wage-dependence, local market prices, and access to agricultural land officially mapped and reordered the national territory and industrial workers in terms of rural and urban. This makes it a typical case of the state making itself through state-making, Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur l’état. Cours au Collège de France, 1989–1990* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 197 *et passim*.

sumed. Take this aphorism jotted down by UDR's Military Commander in late 1943: "the villages need more light." Colonel Boitan was not discussing electrification, as one might believe at a first glance. He was criticizing a widespread, supposedly irrational practice among Reșița's metalworkers: "I noticed that some workers try to sell their sugar ration at inflated prices. This greed for money goes against the best of their interests, against their own health and that of their families, and it is typical of those workers coming from rural areas, gripped as they still are by the power of darkness (*stăpâniți de puterea întunericului*)."⁵¹

The relatively autonomous rural worker was but a codified expression of state simplification. Isolated in a mountainous region, Reșița's local food market was one of the most expensive in the country. Transportation costs were not the only cause. Metalworkers' households depended on bi-weekly markets organized by traveling peasant entrepreneurs. This turned them into a captive mass of consumers whose steady wages could be counted upon even during more inflationary periods. The workers' habit of devising their own standard of living originated in these circumstances, as did their own private cooperative called "Munca". Organized during the slump of the early 1930s by unionized metalworkers to countervail the fluctuation of prices, the cooperative, just like the Workers' House, was run as an *Aktiengesellschaft*. It acquired various primary goods on the cheaper markets of Timișoara or straight from the villages and helped keep prices down.

Equally secluded in their hilly villages of Steierdorf and Anina, miners were even more dependent on what they could buy from itinerant peasants. As Virgil Birou noted in his ethnography of the region, in Anina "[T]he rich have only one cow. The poor miner's cow is the goat."⁵² Supposedly, goats were less high-maintenance creatures that could easily roam surrounding orchards, often accompanied by the miners' wives in their daily search for edible mushrooms. Cows needed pastures, the vast majority of which were enclosed in the company's forestry domains. Locals knew well that "those who have two cows must give one for free in trespassing fines to UDR to feed the other one."⁵³ Sometimes miners bartered by exchanging stolen dynamite for flour, which peasants used for blast fishing back home. In this context, UDR's management decided to open a farm with 40 milk cows in late 1942 exclusively for the miners. The development of provi-

⁵¹ ANR, UDR, 107/1943, p. 27.

⁵² Virgil Birou, *Oameni și locuri din Caraș. Cu 48 de fotografii făcute de autor* (Timișoara : Editura Astrei Bănățene, 1940), 67. The book received praise from one local engineer for its superb depiction of the miners' daily life, ANR, UDR, 106/1944, p. 44.

⁵³ "UDR: Balaurul cu o mie de capete", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 585, August 24 1946.

sioning facilities by industrial plants was the immediate consequence of the scarcity and inflation unleashed by the war economy throughout Europe.⁵⁴ Irrespective of their positioning in the rural/urban continuum, Romanian factories bought land, cattle, pigs and poultry in order to supply their workers. By 1944, Malaxa Works had its own vegetable greenhouse, cow farm, hay barns and 110 hectares of arable land near Bucharest, as did even the smaller metal factories of the capital city. With wages fixed by the General Commissariat for Prices and wage increases excised from collective bargaining, management found itself under increasing pressure to secure affordable provisioning. To ensure workers paid their debts, Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița set up credit funds and encouraged workers to make repayments in long-term installments.⁵⁵ In Reșița, “men of trust” kept compiling graphs, statistics and price lists, but as they were told by the labor inspector in February 1943, all these figures had only an informative value and no direct bearing on wage policy.⁵⁶ Negotiations over collective labor contracts continued in 1944 as well, but were predictably reduced to the amount and quality of food, clothing, and footwear, items which UDR was required to make available to its employees.⁵⁷ Intense lobbying in Bucharest finally upgraded the town of Reșița to the first “wage region”, though not UDR’s mines which remained trapped in the state’s initial legibility scheme.⁵⁸

There was another element of the wartime wage policy which underpinned the state’s attempt to keep industrial wages as flat as possible. The Commissariat demanded factories to undertake yearly reevaluations of their internal labor markets (*reîncadrări*). By turning unskilled into skilled workers, promoting foremen to shopfloor overseers or simply by redistributing personnel between the various sections of the plant, reevaluations could bring better pay to some workers at the expense of others. Job promotion criteria were decided by management alone, even when it had to rely on some input from the shopfloors. This policy was initially regarded as being highly suspicious by UDR’s management because it went against the company’s commitment to apprenticeship and craft mastery. Reevaluations also threatened to undermine the principle of workers’ representation,

54 Stéphane Gacon, “Cantines et alimentation au travail: une approche comparée, du milieu du XIXe siècle à nos jours”, *Le mouvement social*, No. 247, 2014, 3–25.

55 ANR, MM, 631/1944, 203–205 and ANR, UDR, 264/1943, p. 251. At Malaxa Works, credit was premised on letters of recommendation from workshop overseers and foremen.

56 ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 36.

57 For these reasons, by 1944 many factories considered collective labor contracts pointless, for example ANR, MM, 599/1944, pp. 4–6.

58 ANR, MM, 1143/1943, p. 111.

one premised on striking a balance between the interests of the skilled ethnically German workers and those of the less skilled Romanians. In April 1943, for example, metalworkers were evaluated according to skill, difficulty of work, seniority and family standing. But this only revealed the necessity, amidst grievances galore, of yet another reevaluation based on aptitude, perseverance and proper behavior. This last set of criteria ended up marking workers as excellent, very good, good, mediocre and bad, all arbitrary categories which allowed UDR's management to keep the internal labor market rigid by translating the priority given to experience over ethnicity in the language of meritocracy.

Reevaluations took place in a different context at Malaxa Works. The plant's massive expansion during the late 1930s made its internal labor market more flexible and more dependent on factory hierarchy. Workshop overseers competed to recruit reliable workers, build up solid workteams and attract more tasks within the section. When German management took over the plant in October 1941, it was puzzled to notice the extent of the complicities between the supervisory personnel and the workers. Foremen usually increased payment for their teams by 20%.⁵⁹ In April 1942, skilled and unskilled workers were requested to sign a paper through which they agreed to be relocated to other sections if upper management considered it necessary.⁶⁰ The yearly reevaluations brought endless complaints: management was accused of favoring ethnically Hungarian and German workers; functionaries threatened to send a letter to Marshal Antonescu; police arrested workers suspected of bribing the Bucharest Labor Chamber to issue them skill certificates (*cărți de meșteri*); poor quality work was explained by the workers themselves as a result of promoting inexperienced foremen⁶¹; foundry workers could not understand why welders were pushed to a different wage category and received better pay. This atmosphere of suspicion and discontent was pervaded by violence, particularly against women workers. One investigation conducted by a labor inspector in March 1944 initially took this complaint seriously, only to dismiss it: "The factory proceeded with the reevaluation of skilled and unskilled workers based on seniority and efficiency, criteria which are proposed by the workshop overseers and the foremen. It is thus highly unlikely that mistakes have been committed."⁶² It recommended that each workshop display in plain sight its wage differentials and have the

59 "Niederschrift betreffend die von rumänischer Seite gegen HGW erhobenen Vorwürfe hinsichtlich Geschäftsführung in der ROGIFER", BNR, Fond Secretariat, 67/1941, 124.

60 AMB, Legiunea de Jandarmi Bucuresti, 1932–1949, 76/1942, p. 36.

61 ANR, MM, 371/1942, p. 201.

62 ANR, MM, 1189/1943, p. 6.

components of the wage that workers received detailed on their pay envelopes.⁶³ In reply, the workers' delegates of Bucharest metal industries demanded the elimination of the payment-by-result system that, in their view, was used to buttress the minimum wage. What was needed according to their petition forwarded to the Labor Ministry was a flat hourly wage that would collapse the difference between maximum and minimum wages set by the General Commissariat for Prices.⁶⁴

The end of the military dictatorship in late August 1944 brought a momentary challenge to the wartime labor regime as wage increases quickly became the central rallying cry behind the effort to organize workers in factory committees and trade-unions. During a general meeting in September 1944, Malaxa workers were told by a communist union organizer that the Central Commissariat for Prices was about to double wages for metalworkers. This was old news. By that time, the Commissariat had already published its decision to increase wages in all industries. Consequently, Malaxa workers asked for an additional 100% wage bonus only to be informed by management that wages cannot be touched at the factory level. During another general meeting held in October 1944, the same communist union organizer told the audience that it was now possible for workers to abolish the law on which the management's answer relied. Following a session of negotiation that lasted for seven hours, in early November the factory committee convinced management to provide the equivalent of one month's pay as "winter benefits". This was already a significant gain in comparison to 1943, when the end of the year wage bonus amounted to less than a full week's pay. In late November, the factory committee supported the nomination of a new general manager, Nicolae Korcinschi, a communist party member and one of the engineers of the plant.⁶⁵ Korcinschi soon found out, however, that it was not possible to raise wages singlehandedly without breaking the law. Even though higher wages were paid in December 1944, this only happened in slight anticipation of the General Commissariat for Prices's decision to yet again boost wages across all industrial branches.

The example of Malaxa Works was rather exceptional. In no other plant were factory committees successful in forcing the appointment of a benevolent general manager so quickly, and no other factory committee could mobilize as successfully in order to help bend the official wage policy. In most cases, the emergent factory committees' wage claims were met with refusal and workers'

⁶³ ANR, MM, 1069/1943, pp. 19–21.

⁶⁴ ANR, MM, 609/1944, pp. 78–82.

⁶⁵ Nicolae Korcinschi was hired by Malaxa Works in 1937 as a construction engineer, ANR, CC/PCR, Economică, Dosare Anexe, 70/1954, pp. 41–42.

delegates were instructed to direct their attention to legal entitlements such as provisioning, reevaluations and the payment of overtime. The case of Malaxa Works is more indicative of the political climate during the fall of 1944 when myriad communist organizers appropriated demands, hopes and desires that were already articulated by the workers themselves in their endless stream of complaints to the Labor Inspectorates, the Labor Chamber or the Ministry of Labor. Wage claims, purges and workers' control over factory facilities were initially framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle at the factory level.

By December 1944, however, the leadership of the communist party openly acknowledged the dangers of not addressing the workers in the language of industrial peace. In Bucharest, one party secretary admitted that purging "drifted towards leftism" because "the whole party organization misunderstood the party's line and ended up wanting to take over the factory, socialization [...] where workers attempted to oust management because it did not satisfy their [wage] claims."⁶⁶ In another factory in the capital city, newly organized workers demanded ownership of the stocks of the company. "They wanted to be the first socialist factory in Romania" party boss Ana Pauker explained: "they wanted ever more shares, they wanted socialism. [...] Our luck is that the Red Army will remain here for a longer period."⁶⁷ These were not so much words of panic as of contempt for a rabble that had misread the signs of the times.

The Romanian Communist Party's disdain for workers' radicalism was an expression of the bureaucratized Stalinism of the late 1930s exported beyond Soviet borders.⁶⁸ But it was also a plea for safeguarding the wartime wage policy and an explicit commitment to the infrastructural continuity of a state form premised on cutting back the living standard to the absolute minimum.⁶⁹ Backed by the industrialists' association (UGIR) and the General Confederacy of Labor (Confederația Generală a Muncii/CGM), the state retained its monopoly over the legitimate planning of industrial wages. By early 1945 the General Commis-

⁶⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 26/1944, p. 21.

⁶⁷ IBIDEM, p. 62.

⁶⁸ Mark Pittaway, "Making Postwar Communism" in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 268.

⁶⁹ The retention of the wartime wage policy was not specific to Romania. Postwar French governments adopted the wage policy established under Vichy according to locality, skill and gender, see Kathryn E. Amdur, "Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism: Employers and Society in Interwar and Vichy France", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 53, 1998, 148. For the case of Germany, see the discussion of the preservation of Nazi wage policy in the Federal Republic in Mary Nolan, "Rationalization, Racism, and Resistenz: Recent Studies of Work and the Working Class in Nazi Germany", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 48, 1995, 140–142.

sariat for Prices was relieved to note that once more “the working class has to participate in the war effort and the reconstruction of the country by giving up a part of its theoretical rights (*drepturile ei teoretice*).”⁷⁰

The communist-dominated government appointed in March 1945 through Soviet intervention froze wages, encouraged unions and management to sign collective labor contracts, legislated provisioning under the form of factory stores (*economate*) and expanded the logic of the “wage regions”. Indeed, the novelty of the wage policy adopted in early May 1945 was the extension of the Commissariat’s legibility scheme to both family allowance and the so-called “monthly expensiveness bonus”.⁷¹ The family allowance was introduced during the early stages of the war as part of a nationally uniform social wage: factories were required to pay a modest sum of money to their employees with children irrespective of their location on the urban/rural continuum. This was no longer the case in 1945 when workers in large cities received a higher family allowance than the rest. The “monthly expensiveness bonus” was an indexing mechanism through which real wages retained, at least in principle, a modicum of purchasing power in the face of runaway prices. In Bucharest, workers were given monthly bonuses 25 % higher than in the other large cities and almost double in comparison to allegedly rural localities. The wartime labor regime rested on a centralized wage policy, consumers’ sacrifice and a legal framework through which workers could channel their professional demands in the absence of organized labor. This arrangement, however, was undergirded by extensive surveillance. Everyday policing of the home-front was supposed to ensure that workers did not fall under the influence of the invisible, deceiving, and resilient figure of the “political agitator”. Policing factory life, therefore, became a matter of assigning agency to fictitious characters in order to interpret, and often mute workers’ grievances.

1.4 Policing Factory Life

It is not a coincidence that many of the questions currently asked about the successive dictatorships of mid-twentieth-century East Central Europe had been previously raised, in one way or another, by those regimes own policing institutions. Labor historians often share an interest in matters of workers’ opposition, resistance, or collaboration with the political policing institutions

⁷⁰ BNR, Fond Studii, 1/1945, p. 267.

⁷¹ Law No. 348, published in MO, CXIII, No. 101, May 3 1945, 3625–3627.

erected in the aftermath of the First World War to survey the global spillover of the October Revolution. The consolidation of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Comintern in the early 1920s laid the ground for the redeployment of mass surveillance on issues of domestic public opinion, notably for the case of industrial workers. In the words of Mark Mazower, throughout Europe: “the fear of communism prompted secret police to move away from counter-espionage, which had been at the center of much pre-1914 activity to the monitoring of subversives.”⁷² Fashioned within an explicit anti-communist agenda in interwar Romania, the allegedly subversive “political agitator” was nonetheless a global figure invoked everywhere from Bombay to Anina to explain the causes and curtail the manifestations of industrial conflict.⁷³ Political policing, therefore, was imbued with assumptions about what triggered labor unrest and operated with an understanding of workers’ politics that revolved around identifying the hidden tutelage agitators could establish over workers’ immature minds. In Romania, following the Legionary Rebellion of January 1941, political policing institutions were instructed to monitor the activity of the legionaries as well. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that police reports often conflated the radical left with the radical right: communists and legionaries shared the propensity to undertake subversive action against the state.⁷⁴ How, then, should these surveillance reports be read?

One interpretative strategy, developed for researching the Stalinist period of the Soviet Union, is to assess surveillance reports not for their capacity to reflect reality but rather for their “truth-producing effects.”⁷⁵ The narrative entity dubbed “communist”, however fictive, did shape the lives of thousands of workers, who were either arrested or brutally silenced in their attempts to express mundane grievances. Moreover, the category of the communist agitator was endowed by political policing with a degree of intentionality it could have otherwise never gained. The archives of the wartime political policing would later become indispensable for the composition of the official communist historiography. Party his-

⁷² Mark Mazower, “The Policing of Politics in Historical Perspective”, in Mark Mazower (ed.) *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century. Historical Perspectives* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 247.

⁷³ On Bombay see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Workers’ Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the War”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1981, 604. On Anina see Lotar Rădăceanu, “Învățămintele de la Anina”, *Lumea Nouă*, No. 8, February 24 1935.

⁷⁴ AMB, Inspectoratul de Jandarmi Bucuresti, 46/1942, p. 70.

⁷⁵ Jan Plamper, “Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion in Stalinism” in Paul Corner (ed.) *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes. Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71–72.

torians writing in the 1960s or 1970s could freely quote from surveillance reports in support of the argument that the communist party was the vanguard of wartime *résistance*.⁷⁶ One cannot simply accuse this historiography of distorting historical evidence since “communist” was already framed as a coherent narrative entity with unlimited agency in the very same archival records.

The epistemological complicity between the archives of wartime political policing and party historiography was also made possible by their similar understanding of workers’ politics. In conferring the role of ideological tutor to the agitator they both posited a moody, if rather naïve, ordinary worker whose expectations were liable to be manipulated for higher political purposes.⁷⁷ This explains, for instance, the policing practice of ascribing leadership qualities of intelligence, trustworthiness, loyalty etc to the workers who police suspected of communism. Whatever its merits and shortcomings, such a perspective would necessarily end up mapping the bureaucratic field within which these narrative entities were produced and circulated. Thus, it would more likely direct the analysis towards grasping the institutional logic of political policing rather than the everyday dynamics of workers’ politics.

To avoid this conundrum, one could read sources reporting workers’ unrest not as evidence of unmediated opposition or *résistance*, but rather as oblique portrayals of necessarily indeterminate action situations. This analytical move would require an explicit refusal to “make causes of briefly described intentions”⁷⁸, and a sensitive eye for the complexity of workers’ everyday life as it unfolded in specific social spaces. Moreover, the emphasis on indeterminacy would make visible the gap between the small stakes of the shopfloor and the common temptation of police agents and historians to judge workers’ discontent against the yardstick of opposition, or its lack thereof. Equally, taking seriously the inherent ambiguity of workers’ grievances would require a different, less normative understanding of everyday politics. It is here that Alf Lüdtke’s conceptualization of politics as a “constantly realizable ‘compression’ or ‘intensification’ of

76 Revelant for my case is Ecaterina Cimponeriu, *Reșita luptătoare. Din istoria mișcării muncitorești reșitene în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale* (Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1965).

77 For a similar effort to examine the ways in which official communist historiography imagined the agency of the working-class in a different context, see Alf Lüdtke, “Wer handelt? Die Akteure der Geschichte. Zur DDR-Geschichtsschreibung über Arbeiterklasse und Faschismus”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 27, 1998, 369–410.

78 William M. Reddy, “The Logic of Action: Indeterminacy, Emotion, and Historical Narrative”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, 2001, 31.

feeling” is useful.⁷⁹ This notion suggests a way of connecting workers’ experience of work hierarchy, ethnic tensions and masculinity to the shared meanings and emotional investments subjection generates at the point of production.

Let us now walk the road to Malaxa Works in the footsteps of Alexandru Șiperco – a genuine communist agitator who went by the nickname of Titu. On the eve of the war, Șiperco – of middle-class upbringing – was a sophomore student of the Bucharest Polytechnic University and a recent member of the underground communist youth organization. In late 1941, he was entrusted with the mission of reestablishing ties with Malaxa metalworkers, ties that had been broken during the period of the National Legionary State.

I found myself before a task for which I had no experience at all. The world of the workers was radically different from that of the students. Factory relations, workers’ economic and social problems, and their way of approaching political topics – everything was new to me.⁸⁰

It was hard for Șiperco to even start a conversation let alone build personal relationships with the workers. Metalworkers were silent on the road and avoided talking to strangers. They risked arrest under the accusation of subversive activities or they could simply receive corporal punishment from the plant’s military commander. Șiperco himself was equally fearful because “in those conditions one never knew who was an anti-fascist and who just pretended to be one.”⁸¹ There was not much an agitator could do. Befriending some local youngsters on the football pitch was one option, perhaps with the hope that some of Malaxa’s metalworkers might enjoy the game as well. Distributing propaganda leaflets hidden in rolled newspapers early in the morning was the other, arguably more reasonable option. In his memoirs, Șiperco remembers having done just that on the tramline that connected Malaxa Works to the tram stop called Bariera Vergului.

May we doubt the accuracy of this last recollection? The road to Malaxa Works was serviced from the late 1930s up until April 1949 by the bus line 50N. Known as the “red bus” for its color, the 50N could either be a Chevrolet model 1935 or a Renault A-12, both able to take on board at most fifty sardined workers. The first tramline was inaugurated with great enthusiasm only in 1949: tram 23 circulated on what was then baptized the “Work Boulevard”, a road less

⁷⁹ Alf Lüdtke, “Polymorphous Synchrony: German Industrial Workers and the Politics of Everyday Life”, *International Review of Social History*, No. 38, 1993, 67–68.

⁸⁰ Alexandru Șiperco, “Amintiri din ilegalitate”, *Viața românească*, March, 1972, 45.

⁸¹ IBIDEM, p. 47.

than four kilometers in length that linked the city to the plant. Șiperco's parapraxis is therefore indicative not merely of the lack of experience of the agitator but also of his ignorance of the social universe of the metalworkers. For it is not implausible to suppose that Șiperco witnessed hundreds of workers marching to the factory. One coppersmith, for instance, remembered the grueling hour long daily walk: "groping through ankle high dust in the summer, mud and puddles during autumn and snow drifts in the winter only to reach the workshop dead tired."⁸² The experience of waking up in the middle of the night, walking for hours, waiting for and cramming into the bus was certainly frustrating and extenuating.⁸³ It might have been perceived as an unjust form of work in itself, neatly separated from the official beginning of the workday by the sound of the factory siren. However, it was also a collective experience packed with feelings of togetherness, if not with a sense of solidarity.

The emotional grip of this practice on workers' recollections remains striking to this day. Nicolae Breban, a young welder who entered Malaxa Works in the early 1950s and later became a well-known novelist, devoted only one paragraph of his four volume memoirs to his early years as a metalworker. Not surprisingly, Breban chose to remember precisely the nerve-wracking routine of waking up early, changing several tramlines and entering "shortly before 7" and "together with hundreds of individuals, through the gates of the great plant."⁸⁴ Serge Moscovici, another young man who joined the ranks of Malaxa's metalworkers in late 1944 and later on became a distinguished French psychologist recalled his first encounter with the utterly alien (*totalelement étranger*) world of the workers (*monde ouvrier*) in similar terms: "Early in the morning we entered the factory surrounded by a wave of men and women who pushed themselves silently through the open gates towards a number of buildings which were not without some beauty. Nothing ruined my mood so much as the roaring noise of the siren which suddenly shivered my still sleepy nerves."⁸⁵

Moods were most ruined, however, by shopfloor violence, a pervasive practice at Malaxa Works. In April 1942, workers put together a petition and mailed it to Marshal Antonescu. It ended predictably on a reverent yet puzzling tone:

⁸² *Muncitorul ITB*, XI, No. 225, September 15 1959, p. 4

⁸³ Walking to the factory might have induced feelings of sadness (*tristesse*) as well, particularly during the winter when "it was dark in the morning when [we] entered and dark in the evening when [we] left", George Navel, *Travaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 65–66. Navel described his experience as a metalworker of the French Berliet factories at Vénissieux in the 1920s.

⁸⁴ Nicolae Breban, *Sensul vieții. Volume I* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 221.

⁸⁵ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 295–296.

With tears in our eyes we beg you, Mr. Marshal, to authorize an investigation which would inquire about and listen to our grievances and toils. The investigation should be undertaken neither by factory personnel, nor by our officers, but by foreign persons who fear God and treasure justice. Let them ask women, children and functionaries how they live. We beg you to make our lives a bit better or else please let us join you and our comrades on the battlefield out of love for the country.⁸⁶

The last sentence seems to suggest that combat was preferable to factory life. Read carefully, however, it shows that the authors were addressing the head of state as male workers on behalf of the victims of shopfloor violence for only men could offer themselves for the battlefield. Indeed, the first case of violence singled out in the petition made it clear that male workers were husbands and fathers of the victims: "Our girls and wives were hit with a stick by Mr. Popescu, a former captain, and nobody took any measures."⁸⁷ Many of the women who entered Malaxa Works during the war were relatives of the male workers already employed while others might have become family members after being hired. Women were not beaten and insulted only by military personnel, but also by engineers, overseers and foremen. There was not much one could do to prevent this behavior. Workshop overseers could at most be fined, which in turn unleashed more brutality. The factory gendarmes had notoriously strangled one worker to death and papered over the incident to look like a suicide. Apprentices were equally targeted. In one case, a shopfloor overseer punched a young worker so hard that his glass eye popped out, a sure sign of a previous work accident. Black eyes went hand in hand with sexual innuendoes. Women would often take sides with the apprentices, as Moscovici recalled, out of a shared sense of decency:

They saw we treated them with a bit more consideration and we listened politely when they opened up about their lives. Moreover, when they bent over, kneeling with their skirts lifted up their thighs, we did not put our hands on their breasts. We also did not utter those rude words they were hearing day in and day out all year long. It seemed to me we kindled their daydreams, entrapped as they were behind tired eyes and mutilated bodies from work and from the vigilance required against brutality. They defended us when a fight broke out in the workshop. And there were all those small gestures and complicities that made life sweeter during hard work, even though men kept to their dirty jokes.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ ANR, MM, 881/1942, p. 54.

⁸⁷ IBIDEM.

⁸⁸ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 297.

The Military Commander issued orders regularly to denounce cases of aggression but with no tangible effect. What then explains this widespread violence that seemingly permeated work relationships at Malaxa Works and erupted during the war? Certainly, one reason is the variant of paternalism inherited from the late 1930s that the leeway workshop overseers and foremen enjoyed. The labor inspector that investigated the complaint noticed that “for a factory with such a large number of employees, many leaders do not have the habit of engaging the workers justly.” Shopfloor violence was embedded in factory hierarchy to such a degree that the Military Commander saw fit to set up prison cells only in February 1944. Many other militarized industrial plants, including UDR, installed lockup facilities to punish disobedient workers as early as 1941. For the first three years of the war, however, there was no need for such punitive devices at Malaxa Works. Exemplary punishment makes little sense in an environment of generalized violence. If shopfloor violence was finally protested against, this happened not simply because women were conspicuously abused, but rather because “our girls and wives” came to be humiliated indiscriminately.

Nothing raised workers’ discontent more than the sight of wasted money. At the onset of the war, various campaigns were launched to collect funds for the so-called National Defense Loan and countless other solidarity causes. Monetary contributions from the workers, however, were also partly financing expenditures undertaken by the Ministry of Labor in view of organizing educational activities within factories. The Work and Light section used workers’ contributions to buy books and brochures, sponsor theater performances and pay invited lecturers. The spending of this money was taken seriously by workers, arguably because they felt some control over the content of their spare time was necessary. In October 1943, Malaxa metalworkers wrote a petition to express their grievances over the buying of too many useless books. The investigation, ordered by Marshal Antonescu himself, revealed the hidden cause of the protest to be different. It was not the books themselves that triggered adverse feelings, the labor inspector argued, but rather a misplaced object laying around idle on the shopfloor. It turned out that several months before, the Work and Light section had bought a movie projector: “during all this time, the projector sat unused and workers, emotionally unstable (*instabili sufletește*) as all industrial workers are, started to suspected something was wrong.”⁸⁹ Indeed, the canteen could not be used as a cinema hall because it lacked adequate camouflage and risked making the whole plant into a target for aerial bombing. Inadvertently, this case showed to the officials in charge of Work and Light that workers filtered out en-

⁸⁹ ANR, MM, 53/1943, p. 215.

tainment from the panoply of war propaganda they were bombarded with. Movies, battlefield newsreels and theater were equally saturated with nationalist rhetoric, anti-Semitic and anti-communist symbols, but at least one could derive a certain amount of amusement from watching them collectively. Books and lectures, the latter given by uptight men who called themselves “professor”, “doctor” or “colonel” were a bore, particularly when workers were compelled to attend out of good manners and patriotism.⁹⁰ As the director of Work and Light noted with some alarm in the aftermath of the investigation conducted at Malaxa Works: “it is not enough to bring in anti-Bolshevik brochures or to put banners with similar messages in the factories in order to secure workers’ emotional equilibrium, obedience, and the sacrifice Motherland requires of them.”⁹¹

Workers’ perceptions of wasted money were different in Reșița. In addition to the monetary contribution due to the war effort, UDR’s metalworkers were obliged by management to pay for the construction of an Orthodox church in town. The building of the church was undertaken by the company in the 1930s as part of a wider plan to prepare the “Romanianization” of the workforce.⁹² In September 1943, workers refused to continue to finance the church whose construction seemed to them to go on indefinitely.⁹³ Financing the Orthodox Church made little sense: the vast majority of the town’s residents, particularly ethnically German metalworkers were Roman-Catholic while the Romanian workers mostly lived in the surrounding villages and consequently had their own local parishes. The church, however, was not their only concern. Throughout 1943, UDR’s “men of trust” took many trips to Bucharest to complain about the poor conditions of the local hospital. The hospital was enlarged in the early 1940s in order to service roughly 24,000 employees of the company but, as the delegates argued, workers’ social security contributions were not reflected in the medical facilities made available. Police reported that workers refused to donate money for the construction of yet another public building, a so-called House for the Disabled (*palatul invalizilor*) and asked instead that their money be used to pay for more medical staff. Similar perceptions of wasted money loomed behind workers’ blunt refusal, in June 1944, to pay 2% of their monthly wages for the Red Cross.

⁹⁰ In Reșița, metalworkers were reluctant to engage in the activities organized by *Work and Light* because the institution was run by “domni” (gentlemen) rather than by themselves, ANR, UDR, 183/1944, p. 120. On the other hand, they were more willing to take part in the cultural activities of the local *Kraft durch Freude* simply because it was not run by state authorities.

⁹¹ ANR, MM, 53/1943, p. 215.

⁹² Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, *Höhepunkt ihrer Geschichte: eine Geschichte des Banater Berglands in der Zeitspanne 1920–1948* (Reschitz: Banatul Montan, 2006), 61–62.

⁹³ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 144.

Public transportation, violence, boredom, futile spending and decency – all taken together – made up the texture of the workers' everyday and each of them, in one way or another, could and did become bones of contention and grounds for transitory solidarity. Some of the action situations I have described above solicited intense emotional investment on the part of the workers and occasioned episodes of contentious grappling with the stakes implicit in the functioning of factory hierarchy and paternalism. Yet none can be subsumed under the rubric of opposition to the wartime labor regime. What these outbursts of dissatisfaction do show, however, is that workers tried to appropriate and perhaps even exert a modicum of control over the conditions under which they worked and lived. Higher wages, fairer reevaluations and better provisioning were part of the same mundane struggle at the factory level, but these demands alone did not exhaust the range of interests and motivations that pushed metalworkers in Bucharest and the industrial provinces to act on their discontent. The dynamic of these struggles, their rootedness in local configurations of power as well as their wider implications for specific communities remained alien both to the apparatus of political policing and to the few communist agitators who endeavored to backpack through industrial landscapes during the war.

Let us accompany for the last time a communist agitator who tried to lecture Malaxa metalworkers in October or November 1944. By that point in time, as a member of the communist youth organization, Paul Cornea had already served the party as a newspaper boy on the streets of Bucharest. During those tumultuous weeks, he was entrusted with the task of approaching industrial workers and informing them about the new political context:

I have to confess it was not a simple task. In many places we bumped into trouble. Sometimes we were not allowed to enter factories; the owner's right-hand men obstructed us and even when we managed to talk to a small group of workers we were unable to inspire enthusiasm through our speeches. In addition, we did not know 'what' exactly to tell them and 'how' precisely to express ourselves to be persuasive.⁹⁴

This initial uneasiness, according to Cornea, slowly petered out as the communist party's campaign against the government turned more and more vehement. What contributed to the loosening up of the discipline enforced in the factories was the fact that unions and factory committees were permitted to organize. Unionization in itself, however, did not significantly increase the appeal of the communist party within factories. As Cornea found out during a visit at Malaxa

⁹⁴ *Ce a fost – cum a fost. Paul Cornea de vorbă cu Daniel Cristea-Enache* (Iași : Polirom, 2013), 79.

Works, workers were sensitive to the bodily presence as well as the political language in which they were addressed:

A meeting was organized in which I was supposed to explain to the young workers why they should enroll in the communist party. They were waiting for me in silence in the canteen room, which had been cleaned up for the occasion. They seated me to a table in front of them and they asked me to talk. Unfortunately, as I was not used to speak in public, I messed up the words and forgot the whole speech I had prepared by myself in a popular form. I had to improvise and then I told them whatever crossed my mind in a disorderly fashion, with breaks between the sentences and babbling. At one point, covered in sweat and feeling that my audience is thinking about something else, I stopped. The youngsters did not look particularly impressed. They did not make fun of me and they did not feel bad for me. For some seconds, which seemed to me an eternity, they stood speechless. A tall bony guy stood up and told me with a hoarse voice: 'Is this all that you wanted to tell us?' I nodded, what was I supposed to do? He looked at me in all seriousness, headed straight to the door and whispered "Well, good luck then..." And he left followed by the others.⁹⁵

The social universe of metalworkers remained culturally distant and politically incomprehensible even when one entered the factory as a mere worker rather than as a militant. Serge Moscovici too became a member of the underground communist youth organization during the war, but unlike Paul Cornea, he was less connected to party politics and was able to take up a job at Malaxa Works in the fall of 1944 to make some money and to get to know first-hand the industrial proletariat. It was not hard for Moscovici to learn how to temper the monotony of work through strolling, chatting and horseplay. Nor was it difficult for Moscovici to join his workmates at the end of the day for a drink even though "they understood I did not belong to their world because I lacked the endurance and physical robustness that each of them displayed."⁹⁶ Workers sensed that for Moscovici the job was a passing fancy (*tocade*) and yet some of them invited him to visit their homes on the periphery of Bucharest and remained in contact up until Moscovici left for France in 1947. Discussing politics, however, was a different kettle of fish altogether:

An old worker, one of the few communists in the factory, told me one day: 'You are not of working class stock. Yes, we fight against the same enemy, but I know this enemy from father to son. You don't'. Anyway, the unionized or communist workers were discrete, the others did their job without ambition or project (*sans ambition ni projet*). They were more sat-

⁹⁵ IBIDEM, 80.

⁹⁶ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 296.

isfied with the lives they were living, with their work, their food and their wives on whom they passed all the burdens of the household and the family. A thing was sure: me and my comrade, we were both strangers and we could not count on their support, not to mention their goodwill. Not that they were hostile, they were simply entrenched in their own world and sealed off to compassion.⁹⁷

The workers' attitude captured by such descriptions might indeed appear as indifference, but it could as well have been a political act of self-distancing in reaction to the unfolding of unionization at the factory level. The split between these two categories of workers that Moscovici recalled observing at Malaxa Works was the consequence rather than the prerequisite for the emergence of factory committees, a process informed by the articulation of a vernacular of everyday struggle at the factory level.

1.5 Vernaculars of Everyday Struggle

The westward advancement of the Red Army during the summer of 1944 unleashed a shockwave of rumors about the emergence of militant practices among Romanian industrial workers. In July 1944, the gendarmerie asked for intelligence to be gathered on the formation of so-called "action committees" in the major factories of Bucharest. Grass root informants were instructed to pay close attention to the demands that could be formulated by workers: no fines, less overtime, no solitary confinement, no beatings, no night shifts for women, higher wages, no piecework, etc.

Despite the fear authorities openly manifested, the first three years of the war saw no contentious collective action on the part of metalworkers in Bucharest or Reșița. The experience of the home front did not make workers more prone to rebel, nor did it facilitate a boost of sympathy toward communist discourse. The removal of Marshal Antonescu from power on August 23 1944 and Romania's subsequent switching of sides in the war restored the freedom of association within factories and made possible the emergence of organized labor in the form of factory committees. Industrial workers' turn to militancy beginning September 1944 should be set against this background of regained trade-union freedom. Far from being just an outgrowth of war deprivation and plummeting living standards, metalworkers' and miners' radicalism was also a consequence of the mushrooming of factory committees and trade-unions during the fall of 1944. More precisely, workers' radicalization happened *with* but also *against* unioniza-

⁹⁷ IBIDEM, 296–297.



Image 3: *Reconstruction work*; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 153/1945



Image 4: *Clearing the rubble*; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 48

tion and was carried out in the vernacular of everyday struggle rather than in the more abstract vocabulary of class identity and anti-fascism.

This language was rooted not only in the shared experience of work under brutalized war conditions but also in the personalized relations of domination

embedded in factory hierarchy. By becoming an early model of unionization, Malaxa Works offers an excellent case study for grasping how the denunciation of personal domination beginning with late 1944 undertaken by communist militants drew upon the experience of the home front. By late September, there were over 370 factory committees in Bucharest alone, with the local branch of the Metal-Chemic trade-union having around 17,000 members.⁹⁸ Malaxa Works' committee was composed of 10 to 15 delegates assigned by each section of the plant and was supposed to represent all workers irrespective of their skills or employment contract. One of the first general meetings convened by Malaxa's factory committee took place in mid-September 1944 in the presence of roughly 300 workers and functionaries. The president of the committee, one Vasile Mauriciu, addressed the audience and demanded that those among the upper management known to have oppressed workers ought to be purged immediately. No proper names were called out. The meeting ended with a list of demands that specified, among others, that the factory committee should be consulted in case of lay-offs; that wages should reflect the evolution of market prices; that management should distribute firewood, pay overtime and give wage bonuses to married workers; that a tramline was needed to connect the city to the factory and finally that fascists should be kicked out of the factory. Ten days after this event, the communist newspaper *Luptătorul* (The Fighter) published an article entitled "Nazi Agents at Malaxa Works. Arrest Fascist Engineer Petre Carp!" The article portrayed the engineer's biography as a life of crime, corruption and collaboration. It told how in the late 1930s, Carp was supposedly convicted of fraud, sent to jail, released during the National Legionary State only to be employed as technical advisor at Malaxa Works. Moreover, under German management, Carp was promoted and ended up general manager of the plant in 1943. Finally, he was accused of rejecting the demands formulated by the factory committee strictly on political grounds.

There was, however, a more recent incident that might have justified the purging of Petre Carp in the eyes of most workers. In March 1944, a police note reported that a technical supervisor named Radu Vereș, allegedly a former member of the Legionary Movement, was entrusted with the task of selecting a team of workers from the ammunition factory and transferring them to the mechanics section of the plant. In this way, some privileged workers got to remain

⁹⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 114/1944, p. 29. By late September 1944, there were 20 trade-unions in Bucharest with a membership of roughly 100,000 strong. The Metal-Chemic was by far the largest union, followed by the railroad union (14,000) and the textile (11,000). These figures, however, should be taken with a pinch of salt because they cannot be verified from other sources other than the archives of the Romanian Communist Party.

in Bucharest while the ammunition factory was disbanded and relocated to a different region of the country. These appointments, according to the police, were approved by Carp himself because they were based on political loyalties. The campaign against Carp shows the extent to which the delegates of the factory committee, that emerged in late 1944 at Malaxa Works, were able to draw on their intimate knowledge of factory life. For unlike communist activists such as Cornea or Șiperco, these delegates were clearly able to fluently speak the vernacular of everyday struggle and invest it with an emotional undertone that could only make sense and appeal to the employees of Malaxa Works. Take the following examples:

An early article in *Scântea* that purportedly uncovered a number of legionaries among the workers insisted on the arbitrary process of reevaluation. These allegedly fascist workers benefited unjustly from preferential promotion: Cuțar, a grocer (*zarzavagi*), was suddenly made foreman; Peters Peter changed his name to Petrică Petre, lacked serious technical expertise for his position and still became foreman.⁹⁹ Another article retrieved a sense of tabloid intimacy in denouncing the boss of the military canteen, one Florea, for beating women. He was nicknamed “the eater of workers” (*mâncătorul de muncitori*).¹⁰⁰ Violence and opulence coalesced in the figure of the torturer (*călău*).¹⁰¹ While many of the engineers and foremen tortured workers on the shopfloor, it was claimed, the general manager Carp was partying and planning to fly to Germany with his own private plane. Meanwhile, Carp’s protégée Radu Vereș had just bought himself an expensive car and walked in the factory all dressed up “in shirts made of genuine silk”.¹⁰² Managers were further accused of stealing workers’ food, particularly good quality meat so that they only received leftover bones, cheese and marmalade. Several months before, a labor inspector investigated the quality of the canteen food following a complaint from the workers, but dis-

99 “Legionarii de la Malaxa, *Scântea*, I, No. 8, September 28 1944.

100 “Femeile de la Malaxa sunt terorizate, *Scântea*, I, No. 9, September 29 1944. Police reports on workers’ grievances at Malaxa Works often mistook the boss of the military canteen for the administrator of the workers’ canteen, an engineer. Labor inspectors themselves were equally confused and had to inquire about the difference between the two canteens, see ANR, MM, 631/1944, p. 205. The difference was significant because managerial personnel and officers ate only at the military canteen (*popotă*). This explains why Florea Dumitru was suspected by workers of depriving their canteen of its better produce such as meat.

101 “Călăul de la Malaxa”, *Scântea*, I, No. 12 October 2 1944.

102 “Furturi, jafuri și escrocherii la Malaxa”, *Scântea*, I, No. 15, October 15 1944. The price of the car was not terribly high given that a pair of shoes could cost around 20000 lei in November 1944; the gesture of buying a car amidst general scarcity was nonetheless unabashedly provocative in the eyes of the workers.

missed it after he tasted meat in the green beans dish he was served.¹⁰³ One article claimed the chef of the canteen and his wife opened up their own private restaurant with cutlery stolen from the factory.¹⁰⁴ In November 1944, *Scânteia* accused Malaxa Works' management of using skilled workers for unskilled work, forcing them to fill up the holes left behind by aerial bombardment raids. It was in this context that the factory committee undertook to single out "100 parasites" who could not justify their wages: "there are entire families registered on the payrolls doing nothing. There are foremen without workshops and managers without offices."¹⁰⁵ If police reports are to be trusted, by early October 1944, Malaxa workers were disappointed with the fact that the factory committee was not delivering on its promises. Deferred for a couple of weeks, the purge of Carp and his alleged associates finally took place in November and was approved by the representatives of the Romanian Army. With some exceptions, many of those denied access to the factory were either foremen or part of the managerial personnel, including the heads of the recruitment office and some lawyers. They were still portrayed as legionaries and supporters of Hitler, but time and again during factory meetings, the members of the committee reminded their audience that these "fascists" maltreated, tortured and beat up men and women alike. The district police, on the other hand, tended to agree that some of these accusations held water, but suspected that the purge was motivated by revenge and the true cause of workers' discontent was the question of wages. Feelings of revenge and the pursuit of higher wages, however, went hand in hand. Newspaper articles drew on workers' discontent to portray the people purged, not just as war collaborators, but also as undeserving, brutal, lavish and privileged fellow employees of distinctively vile character. These attributes were not merely rhetorical; rather, they were plausibly describing the multilayered experience of work hierarchy while activating memories of abuse and the feelings of humiliation many workers had to cope with on a daily basis. The purge did not presuppose the participation of the large majority of workers, but it did require for the factory committee to validate its actions and to secure a sort of active passivity from them.

Unionization in Reșița took a slightly different path to that of most other industrial localities. On several occasions during the preceding war years, UDR's management and "men of trust" tried (and failed) to convince the Labor Ministry to approve the formation of a local trade-union that would brigade workers irre-

103 ANR, MM, 609/1944, p. 90.

104 For a similar accusation at Vulcan Metalworks in Bucharest, see ANR, MM, 597/1944, p. 8.

105 "Muncitorimea înlătură pe sabotori", *Scânteia*, I, No. 65, November 25 1944.

spective of their ethnicity. In June 1943, ethnically Romanian delegates presented the Ministry with a draft project of a union that could replace DAR and bring together all the workers. This union would extend membership to employees of both sexes from the time of apprenticeship, would negotiate collective labor contracts, organize cultural activities, compile statistics on its membership, provide burial assistance and inherit the properties of the former guild.¹⁰⁶ By late 1944 it was not ethnic tensions that concerned management the most, but rather its ability to preserve the structure of paternalism embedded in the institution of the “men of trust” once DAR was banned and factory committees emerged. Therefore in September 1944, “men of trust” representing all political affiliations were called upon by the Military Commander and entrusted to organize workers in accordance with “UDR’s own norms.”¹⁰⁷ What those norms were exactly remained unspecified and it is highly unlikely they were observed to the letter. For the first time in the history of the company, for instance, forestry workers were integrated into organized labor.¹⁰⁸

By November 1944, management saw that many of its higher personnel did not know how to react to the demands formulated by the workers. The committee and the local union were still not sufficiently bound (*sudate*) to management, nor was it very clear what their tasks were. In this context, and as long as Reșița remained “the most expensive town in the country”, one could expect social turmoil.¹⁰⁹ Hotly debated at the time by the major political parties, a trade union law could hardly solve the problem UDR’s management was facing. The management’s answer was, naturally, its own local variant of paternalism: UDR’s organized workers, read a note by the general manager, have a tradition that goes back over 40 years during which “we achieved a level of education [...] which cannot be expressed by a law or by the collective labor contracts.”¹¹⁰

The archives of the local metalworkers’ union reveal that at least three of its appointed leaders had acted as “men of trust” during the past several years. The other members of the presidium, however, were freshly released from prison where they had served sentences after being accused of subversive activities. Not all of them were communists and only a few joined the communist party.¹¹¹ The early meetings of the union that took place in September and early October 1944 did not mention purging but focused instead on day-to-day

¹⁰⁶ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ ANR, UDR, 46/1944, p. 2 *et passim*.

¹⁰⁸ ANR, UDR, 16/1944, p. 306.

¹⁰⁹ “Scumpetea din Reșița”, *Stavila*, I, No. 1, November 18 1944.

¹¹⁰ ANR, UDR, 21/1943, p. 264.

¹¹¹ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1944, pp. 1–7.

issues pertaining to provisioning, working conditions, wages and the logistics of rebuilding the organization. The events of October 12, therefore, came as a shock to everybody, management and workers' delegates alike. A couple of days before, one young worker by the name of Prică, known for heading the local communist youth organization, broke the glass of a factory notice board and displayed what looked like a manifesto. Like many of his age peers, Prică was not just an apprentice of the company but also a premilitary of the Romanian state. As a premilitary, he was taking part in weekly training sessions under the guidance of a military officer. This wartime institution was supposed to accustom young males to the drill and discipline of military life but was more likely a masked form of unpaid work. Mathematician Egon Balas, himself a member of the communist youth organization in wartime Kolozsvár, recalled his experience as premilitary of the equivalent Hungarian institution in the following terms:

We had to attend weekly 'training' or exercise sessions, which consisted of heavy work assignment like digging trenches, cutting wood, and building roads. There were several hundreds of us, under the command of a brutal, hostile commander called Bartha. The days we spent there were daunting and intensely disagreeable.¹¹²

Daunting and disagreeable as it may have been, the premilitary also forged a certain kind of solidarity among young men outside the workplace, undergirded by feelings of distaste for military authority. Called upon by UDR's Military Commander to account for his gesture, Prică showed "unprecedented cheekiness".¹¹³ On October 12, no less than 40 young workers took advantage of the fact that the plant's prison cell was empty and unguarded and smashed it with hammers and iron bars. When Prică was arrested, he told the Military Commander that the new political regime would not be based on prison cells which were fascist and had to be destroyed. The following days another young worker was spotted selling the communist newspaper *Luptătorul Bănăţean* which allegedly contained an article about the irrelevance of factory military commanders. This event provided the opportunity for the communist press to launch a campaign against UDR's military commander, Colonel Boitan, as well as against his subordinate officer Staricu.

What is remarkable about these accusatory newspaper articles is that while other characters of the plant were also mentioned, it was only Major Staricu that benefited from a portrait in the vernacular of everyday struggle. The others – Boi-

¹¹² Egon Balas, *Will to Freedom: A Perilous Journey through Fascism and Communism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 43.

¹¹³ ANR, UDR, 46/1944, p. 18.

tan and his wife, the general manager Popp and some engineers – were simply denounced for collaboration. Staricu, on the other hand, was nicknamed “Gorilla”: a brutal, sadistic, the most hated man in the town, also known as “the Terror of Workers”.¹¹⁴ Just like in the case of Malaxa Works, the vernacular of everyday struggle was used for emphasizing acts of violence on the shopfloor and the arbitrariness of the process of reevaluation. During the election for the factory committee in late October 1944, workers asked for better working equipment and for the shop floors to have proper flooring and for water to be drained out of them. But they also accused foremen Spineanu of forcing apprentices to do unskilled work and foreman Hübler for whimsically distributing wages to his work team. Calls for purging these “undemocratic elements” were equally frequent as in Bucharest, but unlike Malaxa Works, few if any of the foremen and overseers singled out were removed from the factory. Much to the despair of the central leaders of the communist party who visited Reșița in early December 1944, the factory committee showed little interest in purging the plant. The main reason for this indifference was that a first round of police arrests targeting the leading figures of the Nazi local organizations had already deprived the factory of some of its best workers. Moreover, the factory committee was dominated by venerable social-democrats who were much more inclined to formulating demands than drawing up lists of collaborators. An early communist party report on the travails of unionization in Reșița described the local social-democrat leaders as paradoxical “popular personalities”: “they come before the masses not with practical problems for realizing our common platform, but rather with a radicalism which does not belong to the present: ‘socialism’, ‘struggle against capitalists’ etc. We did our best to have a real collaboration with them.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, this apparent radicalism did not alter the purpose of the local trade-union, quite the contrary: “we [i.e. communists] did not manage to impart the trade-union with sense of struggle. It retained its old preoccupation with petty factory interests (*interese mărunte de fabrică*)”.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the emergence of organized labor and political pluralism during the fall of 1944 turned factories once again, nearly four years after the legiary experience, into key sites of recruitment and self-promotion for the major political parties. The context, however, was radically changed. Wages were now placed under state control; inflation was becoming ever more rampant while social provisioning was mostly allocated through the workplace rather

114 “30000 de muncitori de la UDR cer democratizarea uzinelor”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, I, No. 41, November 3 1944.

115 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 101/1944, p. 116.

116 IBIDEM, p. 117.

than by the market. Much like its European counterparts, the Romanian Communist Party realigned itself in the early days of 1945 to a more moderate position in relation to wartime collaborators. Factory committees, after a brief purging frenzy, were redirected towards supporting the war effort and encouraged to maintain industrial peace. But neither in Bucharest nor in Reșița were the new trade-unions able to bank on the allegiance of the rank-and-file.

1.6 Purging Rules

Carried out in the vernacular of everyday struggle, the purging of military officers and factory managers was arguably the only form of popular justice available to industrial workers during the turbulent fall of 1944. It could hardly have been otherwise. The category of war collaborator made little if any sense since Romania had neither been occupied by Nazi Germany nor liberated by the Soviet Army. Moreover, traditional political parties were unable to propose a language of anti-fascism, arguably because the campaign against the Soviet Union was unanimously regarded as a just war. Similarly, the communist party realized quickly that it could not purge the legionaries *en masse* given that many ordinary workers had enrolled in the movement in late 1940, but should rather put the blame on its leadership.

By early 1945, the wave of purging that had seized factories across the country slowly petered out. The establishment of the General Confederacy of Labor (CGM) in late January that year made explicit the duty that trade-unions had to support the war effort and uphold industrial peace. Containing acts of unruliness that might disrupt the smooth running of production became a test of factory committees' ability to exercise control over workers. It is therefore instructive to look in detail at the purging of Major Staricu and Colonel Boitan that took place in the town of Reșița on January 5, 1945 in order to try to understand the local dynamics of power between workers' representatives and the mass of ordinary metalworkers. What this case shows is that the act of purging was far from just an orchestrated expression of passion; it also obeyed certain rules pertaining to class respectability and proper moral conduct in an industrial setting. Moreover, the event reveals the ways in which workers were mobilized by union leaders and how they further mobilized themselves without these leaders. I will follow the unfolding of the event through the eyes of a bystander rather than simply through the perspectives narrated by those directly involved. Thomas, the literary alter ego of Anton Ferenschütz, was an eighteen-year-old apprentice turner, an ethnically German native of the town and a devoted Nazi who wit-

nessed the purge from the rooftop of a building in the company of fellow spectators.¹¹⁷

Everything started with a formal request. Early on a Friday morning, local union leaders asked Colonel Boitan to allow them to organize a meeting at noon inside the locomotive assembly hall. Duly accepted, the request was nonetheless exceptional for at least two reasons. Firstly, the place of the gathering was not the traditional Workers' House but the factory itself. This choice suggests that all workers, rather than just their "men of trust" were invited to participate. Secondly, workers were supposed to convene during the workday rather than in their spare time. For somebody such as Thomas, accustomed only to UDR's paternalist regime, this was the first time a "meeting" had been called and political activities were pursued during work time. The shop floor mobilization was done by foremen who were instructed to inform their work teams that those who did not show up would lose their pay for the day. Under the supervision of the foreman, Thomas and his workmates marched towards the locomotive assembly hall shortly before 12 o'clock. Sources diverge significantly on the exact number of participants, which probably ranged between 3000 to roughly 8000 workers and functionaries.¹¹⁸ A couple of days before the meeting, the local metalworkers' union petitioned UDR's management in an effort to have 3 workers' delegates represented in the administrative bodies of the company. Met with reluctance by management, this demand figured at the top of the list of issues to be discussed at the meeting.¹¹⁹ But there were other claims as well, aside from shared workers' management (*conducere muncitorească*): provisioning, public safety, prices for primary goods, the scarcity of working clothes etc. After one hour, a memo containing workers' demands was formulated and submitted to crowd approval. As the meeting was drawing to a close, some workers proposed to purge the military commander. Roughly one hundred hot-headed workers (*Hitzköpfe*) started to walk towards the management's building, followed by a larger group of curious onlookers, while the other workers returned to their sections, seemingly in disgust.

We will never know what made the majority dismiss the "take action" injunction and go back to their workplaces. Was it perhaps an expression of

¹¹⁷ All references are to Anton Ferenschütz, *Wahn und Wirklichkeit. Erzählung* (Resita: Verlag Banatul Montan, 2006), 99–107.

¹¹⁸ The local gendarmerie gave the figure of 6,000, ANRCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraş, 3/1945, p. 14. There were an estimated 15,000 workers living in the town.

¹¹⁹ ANRCS, Prefectura Caraş, 52/1944, p. 5.

what Simone Weil called workers' "moral death" (*mort morale*)¹²⁰: a mix of feelings denoting resignation, gloom and ennui drilled in through subjection at the point of production? It seems more reasonable to suppose that this kind of mass passivity was not merely the opposite of participation but rather its necessary political complement: disgusted self-restraint from the majority was what allowed for an energized minority of likeminded workers to come together in anger. Yet it cannot be known what pushed spirits up and convinced dozens of workers to risk life, limb and the loss of one day's pay in order to assault the military commander's office. In so doing, they were equally disregarding the advice of the union leaders who demanded that they head back to their sections. Had Thomas joined one of these two camps instead of pursuing his desire for peep and spectacle, we might have had a better ground for speculation. Without privileged access to workers' inner motives, the historian, much like Thomas himself, is bound to contemplate the purging incident from a distance.

In the space of a few minutes, the mob composed of men and women arrived in front of a three-story building situated on a mountain slope.¹²¹ There were two soldiers guarding the entrance and more inside. Workers were stopped at gunpoint. Colonel Boitan glimpsed the mob from the second floor: a rather chubby old gentleman with white hair and a down-to-earth aura. Soldiers were asked not to shoot and they complied, reluctantly. Boitan soon faced the mob amidst booing and curses. Still, he kept a straight face and his head up as he descended among the workers who were apparently so shocked by this posture they let him pass along. Concomitantly, an officer everybody knew well was tumbling down the stairs in a pool of blood. This was Major Staricu: a man in his early 50s, broad-shouldered, stocky, with dark eyebrows and long, apelike arms. Staricu's most notorious skill was slapping workers, yet now he was himself covered in blows and laid groggy on the ground as one woman repeatedly beat him with a shoe.

Workers dragged Major Staricu to a Soviet military unit stationed in the town. There, however, Soviet soldiers dispersed the mob and told workers they have nothing to do with their purge. Slightly disappointed, the workers then went to a local barbershop, took a pair of scissors and cut off Staricu's hair. This was an extreme gesture that might cast some light on the cultural norms

120 Simone Weil, *La condition ouvrière* (Paris : Gallimard, 2002), 411–416. Weil discusses the role of emotions (*souffrances morales*), particularly boredom and humiliation in relation to subjection at the point of production and trade-union politics based on her experience as a worker in French industry during the 1930s.

121 Police reported no more than 30 persons. In his fictionalized memoirs Ferenschütz recalled that the mob was composed of more than 100 persons. ANR, DGP, 42/1943, 242.



Image 5: Miner mutilated by the military commander of the Jiu Valley, November 1944; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 68/1944

Staricu had violated during the war. We find a good description of the importance of hair (and possibly hairstyles) for Reșița's young male metalworkers in Josef Puvak's novella *Morgendämmerung*. Born in 1913 in Reșița, Puvak was a German speaking ethnic Slovak who became an apprentice at UDR's rolling mill at the age of 15. His militant career was forged in the local Catholic, socialist and finally communist youth organizations throughout the 1930s. In 1942, he was jailed and subsequently expelled from the communist party for treason.¹²²

¹²² Josef Puvak rejoined the communist party in October 1947. He was appointed manager in Reșița and Bucharest. In old age, he wrote a number of stories inspired by his own biography. See ANR, CC/PCR, Economică, Dosare Anexe, 70/1954, pp. 26–27.

In January 1945, Puvak was involved in the local trade-union in Reșița and ideally placed to become an eyewitness.

Much like Anton Breitenhofer's short story discussed above, *Morgendämmerung* recalls the adventures of a young metalworker turned communist. The main character – Franz Percsek – joined the rolling mill in his teens when he inherited a pair of shoes and one pair of trousers from his father. Franz's foreman rented him a room in his house, with the plan of having him marry his daughter. But as friendship between the two youngsters turned into courtship, Franz – now also a student of the local technical school – experienced the trauma of his life. The headmaster decided to have all boys' hair cut: "How could one humiliate more deeply a seventeen years old youngster than by robbing him of his hair."¹²³ This decision, apparently, made the students organize a 3-day strike, an action during which they received significant support from the underground communist youth organization. Fiction aside, Staricu was no stranger to this punitive ritual that frustrated many young workers attempts to engage in romantic affairs. Might we not infer that many of those workers who took revenge on Major Staricu had been previously abused either during premilitary training or directly on the shopfloor?

It is this muted history of slapping, bodily dispossession and mortification that singled out Staricu for retributive justice. The Major was finally saved by a Soviet officer who took him to the factory's medical cabinet. Predictably, the violent nature and celebratory tones of the event did not make the pages of the communist press. On the contrary: newspapers wrote that workers followed the advice of the local communist party secretary and "did overtime so that the hours wasted during the meeting would not impede production."¹²⁴ Police, on the other hand, noted that workers went straight home. Moreover, the newspaper mentioned neither the blood nor the cutting of the hair, leaving the impression that the purge carried no festive meaning at all. The following day, union leaders went to apologise in person to Colonel Boitan, claiming that everything happened without their approval because workers believed the military commandment was a symbol of dictatorship. Union leaders also explained the urge to purge surfaced spontaneously during the meeting and could not be contained. The immediate outcome of the purge was obvious enough: the military drill scheduled on January 7, 1945 for the 400 premilitary young workers never took place. Both Staricu and Boitan left the plant, but not before the latter informed the central authorities that his stay would only make matters worse be-

123 Josef Puvak, "Morgendämmerung" in his *Die Flucht* (Timișoara: Facla Verlag, 1976), 40.

124 *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, II, No. 100, January 11 1945, p. 1.

cause “workers’ delegates cannot guarantee similar events won’t repeat themselves.”¹²⁵ The most significant consequence of this event, one arguably not foreseen at that point in time, was that the issue of shared workers’ management never arose again in the town. The union leaders’ excuses were but an open acknowledgement of a lack of mastery over workers. Just like the disgust shown by the majority of workers should not be interpreted as evidence of conformity to trade-union directives, so too must the violence displayed against Major Staricu not be taken as proof of manipulation. There was reason, desire, scope and pleasure behind both attitudes as well as a local history of specific class injuries against specific groups of injured workers. And there was awe and enjoyment for those watching from the rooftops. By comparison, the next purge that took place in April 1945 was a mere bureaucratic procedure that ended up with some local ethnically German citizens being arrested and one engineer fired.¹²⁶ The gap between organized labor intentions and workers’ aspirations, however, was not only a matter of control; it was also one of support. In such cases, trade-union leaders were not excusing themselves for being unable to extinguish workers’ passions, but rather for their inability to ignite them.

1.7 Terror Rules

“The second day I was sent to explain to the workers of the Bucharest Communal Factories (UCB) what had happened that very morning at Malaxa Works, where reactionaries killed some of our comrades and badly injured Gheorghe Apostol, the president of the General Confederacy of Labor. I spoke with a pathetic voice, but the audience did not even grumble at my calls for workers’ unity. Moreover, during the following speeches they even showed solidarity with the aggressors from Malaxa Works. I was stunned: what are these proletarians thinking? I tried to comfort myself by saying one cannot expect genuine class consciousness from these garbagemen employed by UCB who work isolated one from the other and are always prone to receiving tips.”¹²⁷ The author of these recollections, Gheorghe Brătescu, was dispatched by the communist youth organization on February 20, 1945, to gain the support of the waste collectors of Bucharest.

¹²⁵ ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 7.

¹²⁶ “Muncitorii din Reșița hotărâți să lichideze resturile fasciste”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, II, No. 171, April 2 1945, p. 3. Josef Puvak was a member of the purging committee; see ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 25.

¹²⁷ Gheorghe Brătescu, *Ce-a fost să fie. Notății autobiografice* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), 135–136.

Much like his fellow communist activists discussed above, Brătescu discovered an unfathomable social universe, which he attempted to grasp with the help of a moralizing Marxist vulgata. He too descended from the ranks of the Romanian urban bourgeoisie and acted as a militant within Bucharest's student milieu, for who but a bourgeois student could possibly make the argument that, in receiving tips, garbage men lack genuine class consciousness? The event Brătescu was supposed to explicate to the so-called proletarians, however, was an authentic display of workers' solidarity, though neither the communists nor their adversaries understood much of it. What had happened at Malaxa Works in late February 1945?

On February 19, at half past three in the afternoon, the factory committee of Malaxa Works called a general meeting. This was the third general meeting convened since the beginning of the year. The first meeting took place in mid-January and managed to squeeze some 5,000 workers into the canteen room, the majority of which were already union members. By that point in time the plant was owned once again by Nicolae Malaxa, who had received back his company from the Romanian state. In that context, it was important for the factory committee to underline that it was not the owner but the workers themselves who must increase production for the war effort. As the 5,000 workers entered the room, some of them took to the floor and asked to be granted the liberty of speech in accordance with the prescriptions of the Soviet constitution and hold elections for the factory committee.¹²⁸ Brawls ensued. Soviet soldiers started to shoot into the air. Many workers fled in fear. The communist members of the factory committee were beaten up and sequestered. At around 6 o'clock in the evening, the gendarmerie restored order and elections were finally held. Soon afterward, a delegation of the Ministry of Labor arrived at the plant only to be met with gun fire. The following day, February 20, was even bloodier. Yet another delegation, purporting this time to represent the General Confederacy of Labor, arrived at the factory gates early in the morning, only to be predictably denied access. Headed by communist party boss Gheorghe Apostol, the delegation returned a couple of hours later accompanied by a significant number of workers assembled from other factories in Bucharest.

We know close to nothing about how these workers were mobilized. Police sources identify them as mostly employees of the national railway company and of smaller metallurgical factories of the capital city. Be that as it may, the delegation managed to force its way in and headed towards the assembly hall to free up the sequestered members of the factory committee. Gun fights between the

¹²⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, 368/1945, p. 1.

two groups broke out. Caught in the crossfire, Apostol fell victim to a bullet that pierced his abdomen: “how is it possible that after so many years spent in jail, I now die like a fool.”¹²⁹ Apostol was lucky enough to survive two weeks in a coma and make a recovery after that. There were other victims as well, some badly injured and one shot dead. It did not take long for the delegation to free the factory committee and arrest over 150 workers who were judged to have masterminded the rebellion. Moreover, the dead worker was claimed by the communists as well as by their adversaries. For the communist newspapers the dead was a comrade locksmith: “a poor and honest” man in his mid-30s born in a village near Bucharest, a husband and a father who lived modestly with his family in a rented room on the periphery.¹³⁰ For the newspapers associated with the National Peasant Party (PNȚ), the dead worker was a member of their political party.¹³¹

These games of competitive claim-making and identification with the victims were played out in polemical leaflets, memoirs, virulent newspaper articles, confessions, and subsequent partisan historiography. Surprisingly, both narratives insisted on terror. In a broadsheet allegedly issued by the defeated workers, “Trotskyist agitators” were accused of hooliganism and manipulation:

We protest most strongly at the terror tactics which irresponsible persons from outside the factory are employing at Malaxa Works in support of the committee of dishonorable agitators which has been kept in place against the workers’ will. [...] We want free elections and a secret ballot. We want trade-unions based on professions and not politically manipulated hordes.¹³²

The same rhetoric was used by the PNȚ in a leaflet issued shortly after the event and signed by Ilie Lazăr. It was made clear that “a bunch of assassins” attacked workers who stood for the nation and the king. The communist henchmen apparently lost the elections for the factory committee and resorted to guns, shooting randomly: “the spontaneous gesture of raising the Romanian flag on the walls of Malaxa Works and singing the Royal hymn while the assassins opened fire is proof of your commitment to fight under your national symbol [...] Go forward

129 Gheorghe Apostol, *Eu și Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Asociația militanților pentru pace, 2011), 80.

130 *Scântea*, II, No. 147, February 22 1945.

131 Dinu C. Giurăscu, *Guvernarea Nicolae Rădescu* (București: ALL, 1996), 203–204. The author relies on *Dreptatea*, the official newspaper of PNȚ.

132 Quoted in Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948–1965* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1999), 65. See also Gheorghe Onișoru, *România în anii 1944–1948. Transformări economice și realități sociale* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 1998), 84, footnote 11.

with God!”¹³³ In January 1945, Lazăr was entrusted with setting up a workers’ section within PNȚ.¹³⁴ This decision also reflected a new political context in which the ability to mobilize urban workers for marches and mass demonstrations suddenly became paramount for all political parties irrespective of their traditional constituencies. In organizing workers in Bucharest, Lazăr enlisted the support of former legionaries who pretended to know a thing or two about how to approach factories. One of these organizers recalled in some detail the way in which workers used to visit the headquarters of PNȚ: “They listened to Ilie Lazăr’s speeches. We talked with them. We asked about the situation in each and every factory. We urged them to organize. We prepared them for elections for factory committees, for street clashes and later for other conflicts.”¹³⁵ Top leaders of the communist party also pointed to terror as the main independent variable of the conflict. In their view, terror was less a character trait of the members of the factory committee as much as a failure to secure the allegiance of the vast majority of workers employed by Malaxa Works. Party boss Vasile Luca concluded on the lessons learnt nine months after the event, stating: “Take the case of Malaxa Works: the factory committee had no clue what had been prepared. Its overthrowing came out of the blue. This was the situation. The factory committee did not know how to relate to the workers and wanted to rule through terror.”¹³⁶ Luca further explained that terror was indicative of “police mentality”: “because backed by the Red Army and with the influence of the party ever growing people feel powerful.”¹³⁷ Rather than obtaining their support, Luca concluded, the factory committee at Malaxa Works endeavored to purge workers.

The motif of the Red Army was also invoked by the rank-and-file members of PNȚ. In a private meeting recorded by a police informant in March 1945, national-peasant militants were convinced that the newly appointed Groza government would surely collapse because: “it is not based on the masses, but rather on the support of the army and the Jews.”¹³⁸ For all its explanatory potential, terror was a misnomer for an array of attitudes that ranged from disgusted indifference to willed apathy. It is therefore instructive to turn to the heated debates that took place between the members of the factory committee in the aftermath of the

133 ANR, DGP, 17/1945, p. 296.

134 For more on this, see Andrea Dobeș, *Ilie Lazăr. Consecvența unui ideal politic* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2006), 134 – 175.

135 Horațiu Comaniciu, *În lupta neamului (Amintiri)*, (Freiburg : Coresi, 198 ?), 129.

136 ANR, CC/PCR, 95/1945, p. 21.

137 IBIDEM.

138 ANR, DGP, 17/1945, p. 187. During the same meeting, PNȚ members argued that Marshal Antonescu was not a war criminal, but a hero because he fought against communism.

event. This discussion revolved around the burning question of support: why didn't the vast majority of workers defend the factory committee when it was attacked?¹³⁹ Thus formulated, the question only begged a most necessary dialectical twist: how did the members of the factory committee wrong the workers on the shop floor?

The answers were framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle. Many members of the committee took up jobs in the provisioning department of the plant, including manning the canteen and the acquisition of firewood. The delegate responsible for the canteen was spotted on several occasions eating his meals alone, secluded from the rest of the workers, a gesture which bred a good deal of suspicion: did he secure better food for himself or were his former workmates all of a sudden not worthy of his company anymore? Other members gave up on their regular jobs and traipsed the shop floors selling newspapers or talked on the phone in the management's offices. It is therefore justifiable that workers believed the purge was a mere maneuver to cover up the promotion of the communists: "Rather than working side by side with the workers they showed off (*s-au ținut mari*). Even overseers feared them. I spoke with an overseer and he told me: what can I do? My hands are tied. The committee won't let me do anything."¹⁴⁰

This ostentatious behavior was worsened by crass ideological nescience. Members of the committee proudly carried their hammer and sickle badges but were incapable of responding to workers' inquiries about the meaning of socialism. It often happened that the acoustics of the canteen was inadequate for setting up longer, loquacious, morale boosting gatherings: "we pursue the politicization of the masses during meetings; those who sit in the front hear us, while those seated in the back don't."¹⁴¹ The first meeting organized outside of the canteen took place in early March 1945 when the factory committee improvised a podium out of a train locomotive. During these meetings, Nicolae Malaxa was never openly criticized because "this was the General Confederacy of Labor's directive. Still, he harked back to his own habit of being an autocrat master of the plant."¹⁴² Indeed, engineer Malaxa was freely reactivating his own variety of paternalism in a context in which the factory committee posed as an alternative form of management. It is reasonable to suppose that for many workers this re-

¹³⁹ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 1/1945, p. 1. The same document can also be found at ANR, CC/PCR, Cămară, 12/1945. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the first.

¹⁴⁰ *IBIDEM*, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ *IBIDEM*, p. 2.

¹⁴² *IBIDEM*, p. 7.

turn to a well-trodden manner of enforcing factory hierarchy was perceived as a flagrant contradiction which needed some accounting for in plain, ordinary language. Yet no such explanation was ever provided due to the trade-union's policy of supporting the war effort. It all seemed a masquerade. The idea of workers' management was further compromised by the fact that workers were hesitant to accept the justifications put forward by the factory committee after the last official wage increase in December 1944, namely that there was no more money and that wages were anyway regulated by the state. Instead, workers asked for engineer Malaxa to be permitted to pay higher wages out of his own pocket, even though such a promise was likely never made and probably reflected a mix of sarcasm and despair.

Money was the main topic of debate when workers met at the pub. Police informants recorded one meeting that took place in late January 1945 at the Dumitrică Pub, a well-known gathering place for metalworkers residing in the neighborhoods of Eastern Bucharest. One smelter, allegedly a PNTȚ sympathizer, spoke vehemently against the factory committee, accusing its members of having collected money from the workers to give parties and gormandize (*îmbuimându-se*). He also accused communist fellow traveler and future prime-minister Petru Groza of owning a fortune of millions and the communist Minister of Justice Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu of embezzlement (*l-a prins la butoiul cu miere*).¹⁴³ Moreover, the smelter deplored the state of those purged who were left with no income over the winter. It was not only the purged who were facing unemployment during the winter, but also the roughly 800 employees of the Rolling Pipes Factory. On December 19, 1944, a comrade, Pătrășcu informed the workers that their factory would be dismantled and shipped to the Soviet Union. The factory, Pătrășcu argued, was importing expensive raw materials from abroad and was consequently forced to produce overpriced goods by exploiting workers and keeping their wages down. There were, however, plenty of raw materials in the Soviet Union to justify the relocation of the factory there, which solved both the problem of overpriced goods and that of exploitation. Otherwise, Pătrășcu concluded, the factory would have been closed down anyway, which would only deprive the war effort of important resources. Workers left the canteen in deep silence, conceivably *bouche bée* and unquestionably humiliated by what they had just witnessed: a conceited exercise in collective lay-offs couched in vulgar Marxist acrobatics.¹⁴⁴ Asked many years later why the factory committee could not bank on

¹⁴³ ANR, DGP, 17/1945, pp. 26–27.

¹⁴⁴ ANR, DGP, 31/1944, p. 65. For how factory dismantlement undertook by the Red Army pushed former members of the Arrow Cross to join the social-democrats in Budapest's United Light-

the support of the workers in late February 1945, the then general manager Korcinschi admitted they were “too offended by the dismantlement of the Rolling Pipes Factory and its subsequent shipping to the USSR.”¹⁴⁵

What can be plausibly uncovered behind this range of attitudes and accusations is a form of solidarity against the role assumed by Malaxa Works’ factory committee and the rules of shop floor respectability infringed upon by its communist members. It was not terror that kept the majority of workers glued to their tools during the brawls and shootings of February 1945, but contempt for people who elbowed their way to positions of power and authority inside the factory. It was the sight of wasted money, the smell of unabashed arrogance, and the sound of endless bragging that was met with aloofness and active passivity. This kind of solidarity manifested itself in gossipy whispers (*șușoteli*) and a muted stubbornness to keep working amidst flying bullets. One of the injured members of the factory committee recalled that “a large number of the workers who took part were legionaries, or influenced by them, but the rest of the workers stood put, they did not come out, and they minded their own business.”¹⁴⁶ Workers had all the reasons to stay put and mind their own business. By early 1945, the question of how factory committees ought to secure the support of their constituencies was as much about workers’ own perceptions of the futility of unionization under the given circumstances as it was about the humiliation and disappointment that came with it.

ing and Electrics Factory, see Mark Pittaway, “Workers in Hungary”, in Eleonore Breuning, Jill Lewis and Gareth Pritchard (eds.), *Power and the People. A Social History of Central European Politics, 1945–56* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 57–79.

145 Nicolae Korcinschi quoted in Costin Diaconescu (ed.) *Uzinele Malaxa – 23 August – Faur. Un arc peste timp: 1921–1999* (Bucharest: CD Press, 2007), 125. The interview was conducted in 1993, shortly before Korcinschi’s death.

146 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 1/1945, p. 3.

Chapter II

2 Strategies of Containment (1945 – 1947)

2.1 The Filling Function

On a hot Friday afternoon in June 1945, a football match took place between Laromet's factory team and the Soviet Artillery Brigade stationed in the vicinity of Bucharest. Laromet's communist-run factory committee could happily bank on the cooperation of the workers to attend a sporting event of such caliber and on the physical fitness of the football team to run dozens of minutes in pursuit of a spectacular win against a bunch of Soviet soldiers who "haven't touched the ball for four years in a row"¹. It was highly unlikely, however, that another football match could have been successfully organized on the factory's pitch, just one year later, in the summer of 1946. By June 1946, the atmosphere in the factory had changed dramatically. During a meeting held in April 1946, some workers complained they could no longer carry the weight of their bodies to their workbenches.

Malnutrition and profound anemia were the two key conditions workers worried most about in-between attempts to down tools in May of that year. In the following weeks, some of them started to read anti-communist pamphlets aloud, few joined rival political parties and one even painted the factory's walls with anti-government slogans.² Laromet's workers were indeed restless and as a police informant noted in July 1946, "but this is not due to the ill will of the management, it is simply because the market is way too expensive and workers have no purchasing power."³ This serene justification could bring little comfort and no consolation to the workers themselves, who went on strike in late September 1946 and pressured management to upgrade their wages so as to cover the bare minimum for survival. Nor could the justification – no matter how knowledgeable the police informer had been – provide the slightest tactical alibi for the communist members of the factory committee. Having lost their "tight grip" over Laromet's employees, the factory committee finally resorted to petitioning the Central Committee in order to denounce comrade Constantin

¹ *Scânteia*, II, No. 242, June 4, 1945. Tellingly, the match was only advertised on the day it took place, *Scânteia*, II, No. 239, June 1, 1945.

² ANR, DGP, 123/1946, pp. 30 – 33, 36.

³ *IBIDEM*, p. 37 In July 1946, the average monthly salary paid by Laromet equaled 20 kilograms of fresh tomatoes.



Image 6: Red Army officers, Romanian communist leaders, and Laromet's general manager (center) attending a football match, June 1, 1945, Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 187/1945

Vârcol – the manager (*administrator delegat*) of the factory. A few months earlier, shortly after Vârcol's appointment in January 1946, the factory committee had summoned the new manager to the regional party organization: “we did not know whether he was a party member, but we had an open discussion and we decided to form a collective of communists that would work closely with the delegated manager.”⁴ Yet, in spite of the committee's hopes to collectively administer factory life, Vârcol soon proved “sectarian”: he ignored decisions taken in common, curtailed the initiative of the best among the employees, killed their work enthusiasm, assumed full control, disregarded the daycare, pig farm, vegetable garden, showed no interest in supplying the factory store and failed to take care of the apprentices' dormitory. Vârcol's attitude, the petitioners concluded, “created a difficult situation for the party organization which had the task of supporting the delegated administrator” because he “lost the sympathy and trust of the employees.”⁵ There might be many shades of exaggeration in these accusations. Laromet's archives show a diligent, often dutiful Vârcol painstakingly annotating each protest memo forwarded to him by the factory committee, par-

⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 131/1946, p. 1.

⁵ IBIDEM, p. 2.

ticularly in the aftermath of the September strike.⁶ In November 1946, Vârcol even authorized the financing of a mutual savings and credit fund to enable Laromet's employees to get through the winter and serve as their safety net in the long run. But his reluctance to share power and responsibility with the factory committee, far from being a proof of managerial defiance, was an act of *rappel à l'ordre* in line with the Communist Party's instructions. The concern that factory committees – even those “tightly” run by gifted communist rank-and-file – would take over the attributes of the management, was widespread among the party's leadership. Equally widespread in the first two postwar years was the type of deadlock observed at Laromet, one in which workers, union delegates, communist party activists and managers vied for control over one another, freely interpreting what they took to be “communism”.

This chapter examines the conflicted relationship between the consolidation of organized labor, the nitty-gritty of everyday politics at the factory level and the government's policy agenda concerning prices and wages. I argue that it was at the intersection of these three axes that “communism” emerged as a signifier without a signified: an essentially contested, ambiguous term whose meaning was to be “filled in” and cemented amidst strikes, outbursts of cruelty against workmates, engineers and directors or, more often, against the background of mundane forms of collective bargaining.⁷ The various strategies the Communist Party devised to contain labor unrest between 1945 and early 1947 sparked numerous instances of articulation through which “communism” gradually came to stand for the state's authoritarian pursuit of industrial peace. The escalating tensions between Vârcol and Laromet's factory committee was but one of the symptoms of this process. The carrying out of the “filling function”, however, involved not merely a reconsideration of the role workers' control had to play in relation to both factory management and the General Confederacy of Labor, it also required a case-by-case redescription of the daily ethics that communist members of the factory committees had to practice vis-à-vis their fellow workers. I argue that communist party bosses crafted their “anti-worker workerist” phraseology in the context of the postwar government's economic policies by drawing on a limited, yet flexible discursive repertoire nourished by a mixture of local historical experience and Third International Marxism.⁸

⁶ For a sample of these protest memos with Vârcol's own handwritten comments, see AMB, Laromet, 8/1946, pp. 75–100.

⁷ Ernesto Laclau, “Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” in his *Emancipation(s)*, (London: Verso, 2007 [1996]), 36–46.

⁸ I have borrowed this expression from Andrea Graziosi, “Stalin's Antiworker ‘Workerism’, 1924–1931”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1995, 223–258.

2.2 Prelude to a Wildcat Strike

Constantin Aman stood out from the other 1388 names listed in catalogue “A” – one of the several archival indexes that organizes alphabetically the documentary evidence left behind by the Central Party College. Set up in late 1945, this institution was entrusted with reviewing the biographical trajectory, moral profile and political conformity of the communist party members who were singled out for expulsion or considered for readmission into the party ranks. To date, the entire archive consists of tens of thousands of individual dossiers spanning a period of nearly half a century. Alongside the name, each entry in the indexing catalogue shows the year in which the person underwent evaluation and is accompanied by a short, descriptive paragraph that details the alleged transgression that the respective party member was found guilty of. The accusations range widely from adulterous relationships, violent behavior, embezzlement and other infringements of “socialist morality”, to compromising class background, “revisionism”, espionage and an array of suspicious political commitments, including Zionism and fascism. Aman’s catalogue entry reads differently:

Party member excluded in November 1945 for instigating a strike, supporting its organizers, criticizing and badmouthing the director of the Anina mines and populism.

What is striking in this description is the use of the term “populism” (*populism*). Unlike all the other accusations that were transcribed verbatim from the files that make up Aman’s dossier, “populism” is found nowhere else in the very same files, nor was the term part of the semantic universe of the communist party.⁹ Moreover, “populism” was never again used to describe any other cases listed in the catalogues. How should one then account for the singular occurrence of this conspicuous anachronism?

The personnel of the Romanian National Archives only recently created the indexing catalogues of the Central Party College’s archive. It is therefore very likely that the archivist who parsed the textual material in order to summarize the content of the dossier took the liberty of inserting a word from our own current political vocabulary to describe an action that might be intuitively labeled “populism”. Indeed, it is probable the said archivist first came across the following sentence about Aman: “he sought to use the strike to strengthen his own personal prestige”.¹⁰ (S)he might have then coupled this assessment with the fact

⁹ Characteristically, the word does not appear in Romanian language dictionaries published before the regime change of 1989.

¹⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 6.

that following the arrest of some of the supposed strike organizers, Aman visited the headquarters of the local gendarmerie office where he brought food paid out of his own pocket and attempted to force the release of the jailed workers. Finally, the archivist might have glanced at the final verdict delivered on Constantin Aman by the Center Party College according to which “ [he] achieved cheap popularity by presenting himself as a supporter of those who went on strike who also called him their director.”¹¹ Confronted with such a potpourri of facts and judgments, the term “populism” could have suggested itself naturally to the contemporary archivist as a shorthand for a set of attitudes loosely related to the pursuit of popular sympathies by presumably deceptive, crowd-pleasing means.

The temptation to use the word “populism”, however understandable, is an error of comprehension.¹² Whatever its provenance, the error is nonetheless meaningful in that it could indeed serve as a “slender clue” to the ways in which the Romanian Communist Party, in the aftermath of March 6, 1945, came to interpret, contain and suppress the most troublesome form of industrial conflict, namely the wildcat strike.¹³ For why would the Romanian Communist Party endeavour to condemn and subsequently expel one of its members – Constantin Aman – who offered to support miners during a strike, in a language vaguely reminiscent of present-day populism? Why would a communist party member be accused of purposefully banking on a strike to reap the benefits of “cheap popularity” and enhance his “personal prestige”? And if Aman did not stand accused of “populism”, what was so manifestly wrong in the eyes of the party with his participating in the event? To begin to answer some these questions we need to know more about the stakes involved in the strike of late October 1945 and the context in which it took place.

¹¹ IBIDEM, p. 7.

¹² For the de-contextualizing logic of the archiving process see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 23 *et passim*.

¹³ For tracing “slender clues” as a way of getting at larger phenomena, see Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots for an Evidential Paradigm”, in his *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 95–125. Ginzburg explored the emergence of the conjectural or semiotic paradigm across the humanities, the popular novel, psychoanalysis and state practices of population management during the late nineteenth century, but did not include one of the key institutions of the modern state, namely the national (or state) archive. Yet it can be argued that this archive, to the extent it is composed mostly from the already archived archives passed on by various public and private institutions, is itself deeply shaped by the “evidential paradigm”. Incidentally, this explains why so much archival-based historical research requires educated guesswork, a practice that ought to be acknowledged as such in historical writing.

On January 5, 1945, more than 1,500 miners in Anina met to decide the best way to purge the chief manager of the mines, engineer Vasile Poboran. Much like in nearby Reșița, here too unionized workers put forward a long list of demands that included better food provisioning, new work equipment (boots and clothes), firewood for both married and unmarried employees and for miners to receive their wages on the same day as the functionaries, aside from the removal of top management. Unlike in Reșița, however, the gathering in Anina did not burst into an episode of aggression. For reasons that remained unclear even to the local gendarmerie, on January 9 another meeting was called, during which the decision to purge Poboran was cancelled.¹⁴ The reasons for which Vasile Poboran could have been criticized are unclear. The accusation of maltreating workers was not voiced, nor was Poboran singled out for having enjoyed an opulent lifestyle. More importantly, Poboran had no record of an active political past on the far right, was a respected university professor and served as dean of the School of Mines in the city of Timișoara. He was a member of the first ethnically Romanian generation of engineers to be employed by UDR after the First World War, where he steadily climbed up the managerial ladder to reach the position of director of the Anina mines in late 1930s.¹⁵ The vast majority of miners seemed uninterested in the purge or in any other kind of drumbeat politics. Indeed, one rally organized by the local communist party organization in late February 1945 saw no more than 100 people marching in the streets.

This atmosphere of general political insouciance should hardly be surprising. It certainly did not leave a mark on the communist activist who visited the mining settlement in the spring of 1945 and compiled a report for the Central Committee in Bucharest. What the activist was most struck by was the landscape of human misery he witnessed. Miners, he wrote, “[...] are all exhausted, hungry, naked, and barefooted; their faces sunken and of a greenish color. This is my own impression. Their families are also naked and live in utter poverty. [...] When we entered Anina, the streets were full of children running in front of our car, 90% of which were naked. Many children took part in our meeting and at the end, after we had spoken, parents told us they cannot turn such

¹⁴ ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, 2–10.

¹⁵ In his ethnography of the Anina mines, Virgil Birou applauds the appointment of an unnamed, “ethnically Romanian” director which is very likely Poboran; see *Oameni și locuri din Caraș. Cu 48 de fotografii făcute de autor* (Timișoara : Editura Astei Bănățene, 1940). See also the brief recollections of Ion Păsărică who brags of being the first Romanian engineer hired by UDR after the Great War, *Reșița și frumusețea naturală a împrejurimilor* (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial, 1935).

kids into miners.”¹⁶ Granted, the activist also noted the potential for unionism (*spirit sindical*) among miners but only to add that according to regional lore, the Anina mines are known to be a “slaughterhouse of people” and, given their depth of nearly 900 meters, produced by far the most difficult to obtain coal in the whole country. The sight of impoverished bodies pushed the activist to stop by the local hospital where he was informed children die by the day from scurvy, which he instinctively associated with starvation (*foamete*).

If Vasile Poboran was to be removed, the purge had to appeal to an altogether different experience of the homefront. On March 22, 1945 the regional communist newspaper *Luptătorul Bănăţean* featured an article vehemently demanding that Poboran be purged on the grounds he had collaborated with the retreating German troops in the fall of 1944 and was accordingly held covert Nazi sympathies. Engineer Constantin Aman – a man who had just celebrated his 30th birthday and was now threatening to resign his job in protest, signed the article in the name of all the workers in Anina. Not yet a member of the communist party, Aman allegedly had a personal history of opposing the wartime dictatorship. He was arrested in 1943 for denigrating the German Army and Marshal Antonescu, underwent trial but was finally acquitted for lack of evidence. One year before this incident and following a brief stint on the Eastern Front, as a graduate of the Polytechnic School in Timișoara, Aman had found employment at UDR’s Anina mines, an achievement that might have been the result of the benevolence of his former professor, none other than Vasile Poboran.

The fact that the article was written on their behalf caused uproar among some workers, particularly the more militant social-democrats, who rejected having authorized Aman to speak in their name.¹⁷ The accusations, however, were neither completely fabricated nor entirely accurate. Indeed, it was true that for over ten days in September 1944, the Anina mines were taken over by the retreating Wehrmacht, transforming the region into a battlefield between the Soviet, Romanian and German troops. In this context, UDR’s management had decided to keep Poboran in place together with some of the workers in order to salvage the built environment: the buildings and housing stock but most notably the electrical power plant that supplied both the steel mill in Reșița and the local network of water pumps needed to constantly drain the underground. Conversely, it was not inaccurate to claim that the preservation of this infrastructure implied a series of compromises with the occupying forces on the part of Poboran as the Germans required, requested and duly received food, gasoline, oil and suf-

16 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 89/1945, 4–5. The report is anonymous.

17 ANCS, PSD Caraș, 1/1944, p. 213.

ficient manpower to dig defense trenches.¹⁸ Be that as it may, the accusations put forth by Aman had little to do with truth or falsehood; their aim was not to prove Poboran guilty of collaboration by any rules of evidence but rather to accustom miners to a repertoire of contention seemingly alien to their established ways of voicing discontent.¹⁹

The purge followed suit. When the Minister of Labor, social-democrat Lotar Rădăceanu, visited Anina in early April 1945, he was presented with a memo demanding the immediate resignation of Poboran who stood accused, once again, of having willingly supplied provisions and manpower to the occupying German troops. Constantin Aman headed the list of signatories, which also included, alongside the top members of the local United Workers' Trade-Union, the president of the Anina communist organization, one Anton Raica. Even though the proposition to purge Poboran was rejected outright by the Minister, on April 4, 1945, around 100 miners forced their way to Poboran's office, where they assaulted, threatened and threw him out, all amidst incendiary speeches delivered by a fired-up Aman. Storming the management's building and purging the acting boss of the mines were both unprecedented gestures, and so too was the decision of the rebellious workers to appoint a new director nominated by themselves. The purge, then, began predictably with Poboran being forced out of the mining settlement and ended with the venerable engineer Leonida Boicu fully in charge of UDR's Anina coalmines. Boicu was not a surprising choice: born in 1903 in Kishinev, the Tsarist Empire, he was educated in Czechoslovakia and graduated from the Austrian Leoben School of mining, a prestigious pedigree for a mining engineer in interwar Central Europe.²⁰ Hired by UDR in

18 For Poboran's version of the events see ANR, UDR, 1251/1943, pp. 10–25. The Wehrmacht took over the mines and the nearby village of Steierdorf on September 15 1944 with no more than 100 soldiers; the occupation lasted until September 26. According to Poboran, the sum of resources given to the Germans was significantly lower than that which the Romanian and Soviet troops demanded and received after the region came under their control. Moreover, the Romanians and the Soviets unleashed a looting campaign against the local ethnically German population that also included, on October 1 1944, the vandalizing of UDR's Măghitaș dairy farm, which catered the mining community. For the extent of the damages suffered by the local population, see ANCS, Primăria Anina, 40/1944, pp. 1–400. This is but one of the many such dossiers recording the losses each household incurred during the looting.

19 By repertoire of contention I understand the “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals”, Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2. It is important to note at this point that narrated experiences of the homefront, framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle or simply recalled as “collaborationism” were the means through which *both* purges of managerial staff and claims to better provisioning and working conditions were pursued, often times in conjunction.

20 For a portrait of Boicu, see *Viața Sindicală*, III, No. 213, May 20 1948.

1928, Boicu's professional *avoir-dupois* within the company was therefore comparable to Poboran's. Moreover, according to gossip collected by the local gendarmerie, he was known to be a man of the left, associated with the underground communist movement ever since his student days.²¹

The purge was a success, or so it seemed to the local communist party organization, which credited itself with masterminding the whole event.²² It was certainly a launch pad for Constantin Aman's political career as he would soon join the communist party, though not before allegedly persuading the miners to show their enthusiasm by committing to work a number of unpaid hours, as a token of gratitude following Poboran's demise.²³ The allure of success was further enhanced by the signing of the collective labor contract across UDR's metal and mining divisions, followed in May 1945 by the confirmation of Boicu's appointment and the reappointment of Poboran as technical advisor for all of UDR's mines. These were the very first collective negotiations in which the General Confederacy of Labor (CGM) delegates played a prominent role since the formation of the Confederation in late January 1945.²⁴ Finally, some success could also be gleaned from company records, which showed coal extraction going up from 420/450 tons per day in March to 500 at the end of April.²⁵

By July 1945, the tables had dramatically turned. Not only did production drop to a mere 300 tons/day, possibly the lowest point after the Great Depression, but the rumour of Poboran's arrest by the secret police revealed a deeply divided mining community or, as one newspaper article put it, a "crisis of management".²⁶ Dispatched to Anina to inquire whether Poboran was removed with "the agreement of the majority of workers", one CGM representative, faced with

21 ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, p. 135. The gendarmerie also noted that "unidentified sources" had Boicu a "Bessarabian Jew" and a communist party member since 1927.

22 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 24/1945, pp. 1–2.

23 "Partidul Comunist, motorul producției în județul Caraș", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, III, No. 177, April 9, 1945, p. 1. The article stated: "After the purging of the fascist director Poboran and vice-director Marinescu, both of whom looked to sabotage production in Anina, the miners and the democratic engineers led by Boicu, Aman and Jianu decided to increase production by 70%."

24 ANR, UDR, 31/1945, pp. 26–28, 36; ANR, UDR, 33/1943, p. 75. Workers gained among other benefits an Easter bonus equaling one monthly salary and a similar bonus for Christmas.

25 ANR, UDR, 1251/1943, p. 28.

26 "Soluționarea crizei de Direcție de la minele Anina", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, II, No. 258, July 18 1945. Between 1928 and 1932 coal extraction plummeted by an estimated 80%; it recovered during the armament boom of the late 1930s, peaked under the war economy and dropped again after May 1945; see the figures in C. Feneșan *et alli*, *Din istoria cărbunelui. Anina 200* (Reșița: Muzeul de istorie al Județului Caraș-Severin, 1991), 113–117.

overwhelming evidence, decided the purge had been legitimate. What counted as evidence in this case was a set of written confessions produced by workers about their experience under the occupation, all unfavorable to Poboran. Likewise, over 50 miners working under Aman's direct supervision at pit No. 2 put forward a collective letter of support for engineer Boicu. The plummeting of production, however, could not be entirely attributed to the change of management and the struggle over loyalties that ensued in the wake of the purge.²⁷ As local communist party boss Raica explained, the mines had been confronted with a severe shortage of labor power:

After the war ended a good number of our men just left. Many others took holidays to harvest their crops, and we very well understand that each miner needs a holiday to get things done back home. In order to replace them, we were promised one thousand ethnic Germans from among those locals who departed with the Nazi troops and have now returned.²⁸

The influx of forced labor might have indeed compensated for the temporary lack of sufficient workers, but it could do little to stave off the other burning problem that the Anina mines were facing during the summer of 1945, namely the constant demand by the remaining miners for higher wages and the ever present threat of their mounting a strike in order to obtain them.²⁹ The same attitude was noticeable among Reșița's metalworkers too, but there, communist union leaders could at least appeal to bombastic rhetoric, blaming "management's machinations", pointing out "who is really guilty" and explaining "why it is not fair to strike."³⁰ By contrast, in Anina such justifications were not readily available. Here miners had developed a certain sense of entitlement vis-à-vis the new director, since they were repeatedly reminded that engineer Boicu

²⁷ Poboran was arrested in late July 1945, imprisoned in Bucharest for a couple of weeks and then placed under house arrest. Following endless petitions from UDR's management, family members and groups of workers, he resumed his position as technical advisor of UDR's mining division in July 1946. ANR, UDR, 134/1944, p. 34. One such petition signed by a group of miners explained the purge through "personal hatred" between engineer Aman and Poboran and argued the latter "spoke kindly to workers", "built shower rooms, dispensaries, houses for workers and a butcher's shop" and concluded as follows: "we don't find him guilty, we saw him as a good Romanian; he always promoted Romanian supervisors, never Germans; this does not make him a Hitlerite, does it?", ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 1. Between 1948 and mid-1960s Poboran served as dean of the newly founded Coalmining Institute in the town of Petroșani.

²⁸ "Viața și lupta minerilor din Anina", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, II, No. 266, July 28 1945.

²⁹ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 17/1945, p. 2–5.

³⁰ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 2/1945, p. 2.

was appointed by workers themselves.³¹ Moreover, as the gendarmerie noted in July 1945 “the remaining workers are unhappy with the 150 union delegates who do not work but still get their full pay.”³² The figure might well have been exaggerated but the discontent was real enough: between July and early October 1945 miners attempted to organize strikes on five separate occasions. On the first such occasion, it was the local shopkeeper (*comerciant cu prăvălie*) and former mayor of Anina who was accused of encouraging workers to ask for higher wages:

[H]e did things which go against union discipline; he called for a wage increase and he also argued against the government, telling workers that goods do exist [on the market] and that, provided he gets the necessary papers, he can acquire them. He made it sound like the government does not provide food and clothes to the workers. He managed to agitate the miners from pit No. 5 to such an extent they now speak of striking, which is completely forbidden now that we have our own government.³³

On another occasion, a union delegate stormed into the management’s office and, after asking to see the collective labor contract, complained about low wages and subsequently threatened to organize a strike, a gesture that earned him the reputation of being a “strike agitator”.³⁴ Finally, on October 2, 1945 miners called for a strike after a number of days during which they openly complained of being unable to survive on merely 12 kilos of corn flour and 500 grams of pork fat a month.³⁵ Even though it was quickly defused by Boico, this last strike attempt was markedly different from previous events. This time around miners were demanding neither higher wages, nor were they disobeying union regulations, instead they simply wanted the “winter aid” (*ajutorul de iarnă*) to be paid immediately. In so doing, workers were claiming what had already been promised, as reported in late September by *Scântea* – the communist party’s national daily – which read: “CGM insists all unions have the duty to in-

31 In April 1945 some miners seized Boicu’s truck and used it for their own purpose; ANR, UDR, 134/1944, p. 12. This sense of entitlement was prone to cause disappointment because, as one labor inspector who visited the mines noted: “after the change of management, workers’ state of mind (*situația morală*) improved [...] they started to formulate so many demands and quickly understood this improvement was a temporary sentiment, with no long-term consequence.” It could also cause anger and unrest, as showed below. As for Poboran’s removal, the labor inspector concluded on a sensible tone: “This was the fatal case of a boss ruling in a moment of social turmoil.” in ANR, UDR, 200/1946, p. 57.

32 ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, p. 40.

33 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 20. The shopkeeper was subsequently exposed for having beaten up women and for having collaborated with the Germans.

34 IBIDEM, p. 77.

35 ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, p. 70.

struct employees to demand the ‘winter aid’ by October 1; where they will be met with refusal by factory owners, unions should struggle in a just way for this right to be upheld.”³⁶

The so-called “winter aid” was arguably the first major policy proposal put forward by CGM to address its contradictory insertion into the postwar field of labor relations: a national confederation of local and branch unions building itself up from scratch as a satellite of the governing Left Coalition while militating against wage increases and suppressing all conflicts between employers and employees. To add insult to injury, CGM pursued a virulent press campaign labeling as “reactionary” and “saboteur” any factory owner or manager unwilling to withstand workers’ pressure for higher wages. Conversely, workers were instructed to “reject all wage bonuses offered by employers” in addition to those already granted by law in December 1944.³⁷ In its commitment to forestall inflation by upholding price controls for industrial commodities and implementing a general freeze of industrial wages, the Groza Cabinet called upon CGM to “build a wall around the new government”.³⁸ This martial jargon was replicated by communist union leaders as well, one of whom explained in June 1945 that CGM considers workers “an army entrusted to accomplish the hard task of reconstruction”.³⁹ These words indicate a wider containment strategy of industrial conflict within which CGM was assigned the role of patrolling the stalemate that existed between state, labor and capital during the war into peacetime, at the risk of abandoning customary union prerogatives and alienating traditional working-class constituencies.⁴⁰ In this context, the “winter aid” might be seen as a mild concession to workers, a wage indexing policy sidestepping the strict governmental

36 “Pentru ajutorul de iarnă”, *Scântea*, III, No. 333, September 22 1945. The decision to implement the “winter aid” was first made public on September 17 in CGM’s official newspaper *Viața sindicală*.

37 “Legile economice”, *Scântea* I, No. 22, May 20 1945.

38 *Scântea*, II, No. 185, April 1, 1945.

39 ANR, MM, 1074/1945, p. 5.

40 In the mining region of the Jiu Valley, for instance, by July 1945 local unions had stopped organizing meetings in which workers’ demands were supposed to be discussed, ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 61/1945, p. 24. This transformation of the trade-union movement during the better half of 1945 was later applauded in partisan historiography as proof of the willingness of the “masses” to “sacrifice” themselves in the name of “reconstruction”; the *locus classicus* is Trofin Hăgan, *Sindicatelor unite din România: 1944–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968). Covering Northern Transylvania and written from the standpoint of the communist party, Hăgan’s book remains the standard work on the topic, mostly because the author had access to currently missing trade-union archives. Hăgan was rightly criticized by another party historian for neglecting, among others, workers’ involvement in the purges; see Ioan Chiper’s review in *Studii. Revistă de Istorie*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1969, 167–168.

anti-inflationary agenda: companies were now required to pay an additional wage bonus, the equivalent of a monthly salary, to all employees irrespective of family standing, workload or length in service, which would allow workers in principle to get through the winter season.⁴¹ The policy was predictably met with protest by employers across the country and triggered an upsurge of workplace militancy during the whole month of October 1945.

2.3 The Question of the *Porte-Parole*

CGM's unexpected decision to force the payment of an additional monthly wage in the name of "winter aid" caused a lot of confusion. UDR's management initially argued that the decision went against the law and claimed it fell only within the province of the General Commissariat for Prices to legislate additional wage increases.⁴² This reasoning was legally sound but failed to appreciate the impact the decision would have on ordinary workers, many of whom were now impatiently awaiting the promised money. Moreover, UDR invoked the mediation of the Arbitrage Commission, claiming this extra payment was already inscribed into the collective labor contract as a Christmas bonus and neither workers nor CGM had any right to ask for more. Even though the Ministry of Labor ruled in favor of the workers, UDR kept refusing to pay the "winter aid".⁴³ The tug-of-war carried out by UDR's management not only postponed the delivery of the "winter aid" well beyond the deadline set by CGM but also embarrassed local union leaders in Reșița. On October 6, 1945 one union representative already noted with some alarm that the trade-union was placed in a "compromising position before the wage-earners" which could lead to "more or less violent, spontaneous outbursts with severe consequences, just like it happened in the past when the masses were discontent."⁴⁴

What the "past" referred to in this particular sentence was made explicit on October 24 when union leaders met to discuss UDR's last-minute proposal to pay the "winter aid" in two installments. Union leaders decided against the installments and pushed for the entire sum to be given to workers by November 1, 1945. The meeting concluded with a warning to management: "workers in Reșița want

⁴¹ "Ajutorul de iarnă este un drept al muncitorilor", *Scântea*, III, No. 340, September 30 1945.

⁴² ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 33.

⁴³ For a taste of these negotiations, replete with threats, refusals and legal arguments see ANR, DGP, 42/1943, pp. 273–286.

⁴⁴ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, p. 13.

to remind these saboteurs of a single name: Staricu!”⁴⁵ There could be no clearer allusion to the purge of January 1945. Many other industrial communities across the country found such words of anger ineffective. In the Jiu Valley mining region, for example, disgruntled workers employed the term “saboteur” for a director unable to pay the “winter aid”, but they also attempted to arrest him and ended up sequestering the man in his own house.⁴⁶ Closer to home, on October 17, the director of one of UDR’s smaller coalmines was physically assaulted and sequestered by three miners claiming they were communists and could therefore run the mine all by themselves.⁴⁷ Little did these poor, possibly inebriated workers know that their irreverence to authority and naive ambitions of self-management were exactly what the leaders of the communist party deplored the most. In late September 1945, party boss Chivu Stoica furiously explained that workers misread the party line, got too involved in union politics and in some places even went on to “sequester the owner and force him to pay immediately” the “winter aid”.⁴⁸ This was a serious misunderstanding that stemmed, according to party boss and sociologist Miron Constantinescu, from the failure of the rank-and-file to acknowledge the switch in party tactics that occurred after the appointment of the Groza government. In this new political conjuncture, communists were no longer allowed to commit “leftist excesses” but were rather required to back up the government and support capitalists. Confronted with puzzled party members and baffled union leaders, Constantinescu was adamant in defending this position:

They [i. e. the capitalists] have to earn, otherwise we cannot count on them. This is the basic law of capitalism – profit. Within the prevailing conditions, we have to give them the opportunity to invest and to earn. They cannot simply invest for the sake of it and the sacrifice of the people.⁴⁹

Such tactical considerations traveled slowly and, even when they did reach the rank-and-file in the provinces, were very likely to fall on deaf ears. This was certainly the case in Anina. Here, the party constituency had a much more personal, and even popular, interpretation of “communism” and the duties of membership. One CGM delegate who visited the mining settlement in October 1945

⁴⁵ IBIDEM, p. 9. The meeting took place one day after an aborted strike attempt in one section of the steel mill, ANCS, UDR Caraş, 11/1945, p. 1.

⁴⁶ ANR, MM, 1042/1945, p. 734. In the mining town of Petrila dynamite was used to blow up the house of an allegedly hostile engineer.

⁴⁷ ANR, UDR, 252/1946, p. 1; also ANR, UDR, 151/1945, pp. 39–50.

⁴⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 46/1945, p. 4.

⁴⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 65/1945, p. 48.

noted local communists were highly interested in moving into the abandoned houses left behind by the dislocated ethnically German population. They were also eager to monopolize all union positions and successfully managed to force the resignation of the local gendarmerie officer-in-chief.⁵⁰ Matters of doctrine were obviously not totally ignored, but out of the 384 registered party members, only 18 were regularly attending the weekly lectures on “Class and Class Consciousness” delivered by engineer Constantin Aman.⁵¹ When Aman was out of town, as happened for one week in October, schooling was cancelled because nobody felt prepared to broach such an esoteric topic. Doctrinal teaching and party tactics, however, were far from convergent. This was the great lesson Constantin Aman along with some of the miners would learn in the aftermath of the strike.

“Winter aid” money made it to Anina on October 27, 1945. UDR’s accounting office in Reșița, knowing the damaged state of the road that linked the two localities, decided to transport all the cash in one load.⁵² This money would then be split in two installments, the first of which had to be allotted before November 1, the second only after November 15. The reason behind this method of payment was straightforward enough: paid by the hour (or more precisely by the number of “shifts” they put in) miners would customarily take a few days off after receiving similar wage bonuses in order to buy up provisions or simply carry the money back home to their needy families. To avoid a sudden drop in manpower, UDR’s management understandably opted to divide the “winter aid”, but since the whole amount was already in Anina, the final decision resided with the local director. Aware of this situation, in the afternoon of October 30, 1945, the vast majority of the miners at the King Ferdinand pit went on strike. In a couple of hours, the total number of strikers reached 2070 strong. What they demanded was for the “winter aid” to be paid *in toto* on the spot. Their request was equally straightforward: prices for basic commodities, mostly food items such as wheat, corn and pork fat, would likely spiral upwards as the winter season set in. The two installments policy, therefore, had to be overturned for miners to be able to make good use of the money at peasant markets.

Engineer Aman learned about the strike on the very same day during a regular communist party meeting with some of his subordinate miners. He was arguably the last of the engineers to do so, and as he arrived to the King Ferdinand

⁵⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 96/1945, p. 27.

⁵¹ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 24/1945, p. 3–5. By contrast, the local trade-union boasted 2425 members in October 1945, out of which 260 were women.

⁵² ANR, UDR, 133/1945, pp. 26–39. The distance between the two localities was about 35 kilometers of rough country road.

pit to “break the strike” there was hardly anybody left; miners were either home or gathered in the central square. By that point in time, a whole host of engineers headed by Boicu himself had tried and failed to persuade the strikers to resume work. Many of these engineers appealed to commonsense arguments, calling on miners to give up their protest because they hurt the company, the government, the country and finally themselves. Strikers replied only with a chorus of “Money!” Nothing could seemingly deter the miners, not even the reference to the old-age custom of allowing some workers to enter the underground and monitor the functioning of the water pumps – possibly a tacit agreement that applied between striking workers and management in the past. When engineer Rădulescu raised this issue and offered himself for the task, miners were “impressed”, took a moment of silence and finally accepted the proposal grudgingly.⁵³ Engineer Aman met some miners late in the night and attempted once again to discourage them to continue: “they approved my opinions, but when it came down to it (*dar când era la adicătealea*), they refused to resume work.”⁵⁴ The strike went on for another day.

On October 31, 1945, miners were promised 90% of the “winter aid” by none other than Iosif Mustețiu, the leader of Reșița’s trade-union, who had hurriedly arrived in Anina during the early morning hours to disperse the strike: rejecting his last offer, miners turned to matters of organization in a renewed effort to entirely paralyze the mining activity. On the previous day, a good portion of the roughly 200 ethnic German forced laborers had been used to keep the mines running.⁵⁵ Moreover, many miners under Aman’s supervision at pit No. 2 refused to join the strike and continued to work unabated. They were soon singled out as scabs, strikebreakers who needed to be punished for their lack of solidarity and open defiance of majority opinion.⁵⁶ To be fair, miners at pit No. 2 did attempt to refuse to work during the night and morning shifts on October 31, no doubt out of fear for reprisals from their peers, but they were convinced by Aman to enter the underground “on his own responsibility”. It did not take long for the strikers to make an appearance armed with “axes and cudgels”, take out the scabs by their moustaches (*trași de mustață*) and threaten to kill every single one of them if they did not stop working. Physical violence, howev-

53 IBIDEM, p. 46.

54 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 2.

55 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, p. 7. Between July and October 1945, the Anina mines received over 800 forced workers of German origin, all of them Romanian citizens who had escaped deportation to the Soviet Union in January 1945. By October 1945, the mines retained a contingent of 174 men and 36 women.

56 ANR, MM, 759/1945, 37.

er, was kept to a minimum due to Aman's energetic intervention which prevented a massive brawl: "in one of my speeches I told them that if they don't want to do it for the government, for UDR, for the trade-union, then they should do it for me and get back to work."⁵⁷ The appeal to trust and personal loyalty backfired against Aman's best intentions as strikers immediately asked the engineer to accompany them to the central square and confided in him their plan to shut down the electrical power plant and remove engineer Leonida Boicu from his position of acting boss of the Anina mines.⁵⁸ Workers explained to Aman they no longer needed union delegates – "drunkards constantly asking for money" – or the trade-union itself, which had to be abolished together with the monthly union fee.⁵⁹ On their way to the central square, strikers shouted: "Long live our new director, engineer Aman!"⁶⁰

This scene was reminiscent of miners' involvement in the purging of Poboran in early April 1945. This time, however, there were over 2000 of them rather than a mere 100 who wanted to appoint their own director by force of numbers, vox populi and majority will. Engineer Aman was subsequently asked to call the central management in Reșița, pass on their demands and start negotiations over the phone with one of UDR's bosses – Alexandru Vellan – for the payment of the "winter aid" in full. For a couple of hours, then, engineer Aman behaved as the strikers' legitimate representative: he felt deeply offended by the negative reply he got from Vellan and flattered by the confidence miners displayed towards him. Unsurprisingly, he also felt he could dominate the workers: "I was among them all the time; I was the one who controlled (*stăpâneam*) them; I was the one whom they blindly followed. I knew their psyche; I had them eating

57 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4.

58 The electrical power plant was a nodal point on UDR's integrated production chain. As anthropologist Jonathan Parry noted with reference to a strike at the Bhilai Steel Plant in India "[...] strikers invaded the power plant and forced its shutdown. Power is a strategic target. Bhilai is an integrated plant: if production is disrupted at some point in the cycle, the whole plant grinds to a halt and major items of capital investment – like blast furnaces – are at serious risk.", "'Sociological Marxism' in Central India. Polanyi, Gramsci, and the Case of the Unions", in Chris Hann and Keith Hart (eds.) *Market and Society. The Great Transformation Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 188.

59 This anti-union stance makes the strike in Anina a wildcat strike. The question here is not whether it was planned or spontaneous, but rather whether it was carried out outside of the trade-union and without the involvement of consecrated union officials; Alvin W. Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike. A Study in Worker-Management Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 92–95. By this definition, all strikes of the postwar period were wildcat strikes.

60 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4.

from the palm of my hand.”⁶¹ This sense of mastery was reinforced by the strikers’ blunt refusal to speak to anyone else: they brutally silenced Mustețiu, booed other engineers, ignored one labor inspector, disregarded local union leaders and bullied one UDR spokesperson. Late on October 31, when the gendarmerie, aided by local communists, arrested 14 workers, it was the same sense of mastery over the striking miners that pushed Aman to militate for their release in order to avoid bloodshed. He argued the arrest was likely to prompt an attack on the gendarmerie office by the infuriated workers, followed by a manhunt of the communists because workers were punished by their “vanguard” and “will never forget this insult”.⁶² The next morning engineer Aman brought them food, again with the aim to avoid further violence and to show to the rest of the workers that the arrested were taken care of.

By November 1, 1945 the strike was over. Repression softened the strikers and made them reconsider the offer to have 90% of the “winter aid” paid on the spot. Investigations followed: no less than 50 workers were fined for insubordination; another 26 were fired for instigating the strike, as was Constantin Aman for his “attitude during the strike, which constituted a serious breach of job obligations and a total disregard of trade-union authority.”⁶³ The engineer saw his position differently and could hardly accept this verdict: “as a communist party member I was glad to see workers in Anina begin to develop a modicum of class consciousness. They start to ask for their rights. This means they now realize they can contribute to civilization and humanity.”⁶⁴ For local communist party boss Anton Raica, the young engineer contributed to the strike with not only a rather significant sum of money for food, but also with an unnerving sense of manly pride: “Aman always bragged about fearing no one because miners would never hurt him.”⁶⁵ What engineer Aman brought to the strike, then, was respect and respectability, both rooted in a culture of masculinity specific to mining communities around the world.⁶⁶

⁶¹ IBIDEM.

⁶² IBIDEM.

⁶³ ANR, UDR, 133/1945, p. 61.

⁶⁴ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4

⁶⁵ IBIDEM, p. 1.

⁶⁶ For more on the masculine work culture of miners, see Thomas Miller Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile’s El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1951* (Duke University Press, 1998), 127–154. The universalism this culture of manhood should not be underestimated. From the Bolivian tin mines to the gold mines of Nagybánya, male miners believed women entering the mines bring nothing but bad luck, a taboo worthy of structuralist anthropology.

It may be instructive here to recall the portrait of an esteemed engineer from Virgil Birou's masterpiece *Lume fără cer*, a novel set in Anina during the First World War. The novel excels in its depiction of masculinity: daily brawls, speaking back to foremen, violence towards bosses mixed with heavy drinking, swear words galore, acts of rape and domestic violence, the valuing of physical strength, hard work, and skill; dignity before death by mining accidents and the pride of facing risks in the underground. In this context, young engineer Rot was respected because "his movements were reasoned, just like his words; never did miners hear him swear"; "his orders were clear, resembling more a kind advice, delivered with a warm voice"; "miners trusted him because whatever happened, when he descended among them, they calmed down". Rot was a good professional, always the first to risk his life in the pit during occasional accidents, a man with an "open heart": yet miners "did not love him, outside of work they would never get friendly, but he was seen as a man who would justly earn himself a nice future."⁶⁷

Judging by his professional credentials, wartime resistance and postwar political opinions, engineer Aman should have been able to look forward to a nice future, one shaped in equal measure by the respect he enjoyed from the miners and by his association with the communist party, the undisputed political force in Anina following the purge of Poboran. This double determination explains to a certain degree Aman's position during the strike, to wit his ability and willingness to engage in a series of established practices in order to secure the end of the strike. Joining strikers in the central square, speaking on their behalf with management over the phone, quelling outbursts of violence, visiting the arrested men and buying food for them – these gestures seemed to Aman to prove his control over the situation and to precipitate its ending. Conversely, workers might have felt assured in having found a *porte-parole* for their cause, a respectable communist engineer with a noteworthy political pedigree ready to translate their grievances peacefully, one worthy even of being appointed the new director of the Anina mines if need be. Similar fruitful mutual misunderstandings between engineers and workers had formed the backbone of striking activity in the past.⁶⁸

What shattered Aman's "nice future" with the communist party and UDR was the subsequent reordering of these cultural practices into a consistent nar-

⁶⁷ Virgil Birou, *Lume fără cer* (Timișoara: Editura Diacritic, 2011), 71–72. First published in 1947, the novel was most probably completed during the immediate postwar. Birou was himself a mining engineer, though a non-practicing one.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the strike narrated by Carol Ardeleanu in his *Viermii pamântului* (Bucharest: Adevarul S.A., 1933), a novel set in interwar Anina.

rative structured by an underlining, highly individualizing plot. Investigators – an array of police officers, trade-union delegates and management representatives – opted to speak of workers as “instigators”.⁶⁹ So too did the communist party with reference to Aman. Many of the haphazard practices the engineer pursued in search of control were redescribed as building blocks to the edifice of personal popularity: respect appeared as prestige in need of enhancement, mastery over people as loyalty to the strikers, the avoidance of violence as “lack of principle” and opportunism. These are some of the ingredients that make up the recipe for populism, at least for our contemporary sensibilities. For the Central Party College in 1945 there was little room for ambiguity or incoherence in what Aman did during the strike, for at the end of the concatenation of events, the engineer had to emerge as someone dishonestly on the side of the workers: “[he] achieved cheap popularity by presenting himself as a supporter of those who went on strike who also called him their director.”⁷⁰

The mechanism at work here, one that would be constantly employed by the communist party in its encounter with varying cultural practices on the ground, aimed to order meaning out of what William Sewell called the “babble of cultural voices” or the “semiotic sprawl”.⁷¹ Sewell drew attention to the manifold ways in which large-scale cultural actors such as state institutions, political parties, churches or corporations – “even in powerful and would-be totalitarian states” – strive not for the direct imposition of cultural uniformity, but rather employ strategies of “organizing difference”, whereby various cultural practices are marginalized, excluded or normalized with the goal of obtaining “a certain focus on the production and consumption of meaning.”⁷² In this sense, ordering meaning implies less a conspicuous effort to impose a supposedly uniform “communist” code of conduct on the rank-and-file – an effort which would have been logistically impossible anyway in 1945 – but rather the attempt to marginalize or even criminalize industrial practices judged to be at odds with party tactics at any given point in time.

Such was the case with the act of appointing the director by the miners themselves, which was celebrated as an achievement of the communist party when Poboran was removed. Yet once reenacted by the miners themselves during

⁶⁹ ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 225.

⁷⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 6.

⁷¹ William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture”, in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 56–57.

⁷² IBIDEM. Sewell’s comments can indeed be read, as he himself admits, as a down-to-earth gloss on the Gramscian notion of “hegemony”.

the apex of the strike in the case of Aman, the communist party quickly subsumed the act under the demeaning rubric of “cheap popularity”. In the postwar field of labor relations, then, the codification of “communism” as a cluster of rules of identification and self-identification of the rank-and-file was premised on the redescription and reordering of myriad locally embedded cultural practices. Or to put it differently: because the meaning of “communism” was not textually given but rather socially mediated, every instance of labor unrest became a site of struggle over the politically accepted understanding of party membership.

Party leaders aligned the strike in Anina with three other “small strikes” that had a “rather symbolic character”.⁷³ What these events, scattered across the country, had in common from the standpoint of the party was the failure of ordinary communists to contain workers’ unrest. The failure was explained dialectically, as the combined outcome of two ostensibly incongruous attitudes displayed by the rank-and-file: sectarianism and leftism. The first implied their reluctance to attract new members and refusal to engage other workers; the latter signaled their willingness to get involved in open industrial conflict and mobilize workers to this purpose. Sectarianism and leftism – both terms with a venerable history in the global Bolshevik movement known as the Third International – were ideally suited to capture and release the tension accumulated within local party organizations, namely their double burden of recruiting working-class members while supporting business and repressing strikes. With the removal of engineer Aman from the local party organization, this double burden was placed squarely on the shoulders of comrade Anton Raica, the secretary of the communist party, vice-president of the local trade-union and a hardened miner. Raica behaved in an exemplary manner during the strike: not only did he avoid mingling with the strikers, but he also helped with their arrest and informed on Aman’s maneuvers.

Yet it took only three weeks, after the end of the strike, for Raica to come under the spotlight for unruly commitments as a party member. In late November 1945, a delegate who stopped by in Anina remarked that the situation was still “unhealthy”: Comrade Raica fell under the influence of some interested people from outside of our party; they look to use him for their own personal goals. We will have to either replace him or keep him under surveillance. And he keeps drinking, in spite of our repeated criticism.⁷⁴ What falling “under the influence” meant in this mysterious observation would become clear in early January 1946

⁷³ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 99/1945, p. 40.

⁷⁴ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 1/1945, p. 4.

when Raica orchestrated a leaflet campaign calling for the removal of the head of the miners, engineer Boicu. Pressured by the rank-and-file and possibly by non-communist workers as well, Raica was tapping into the sense of entitlement the majority of miners still entertained vis-à-vis the management. He claimed Boicu was appointed director of the mines not because he was a communist as he himself believed, but rather because he was the only important engineer who expressed confidence in the triumph and legitimacy of purging Poboran. He further accused Boicu of “sabotage” and of disregarding the demands of the local trade-union. In his defense, Boicu pointed to his long-standing allegiance to the communist party, argued that the local union did little to prevent the strike, and complained of being exasperated by phone calls from Raica and condemned workers’ habit of using the company’s trucks as they pleased.⁷⁵

By March 1946, it was obvious Raica ended up acting as a porte-parole of the workers against management thus bending the party line to the limit. In addition, he was personally involved in negotiating the comeback of those miners laid-off following the strike and never tired of accusing Boicu of sabotage.⁷⁶ This conflict openly questioned political loyalties, union prerogatives and factory hierarchy since it took place concomitantly within the communist party, across the mining community and along UDR’s chain of command. What drove and justified it was precisely the success of the purge, and the subsequent assertion that workers appointed their own director. Since the strike left this perception untouched, the conflict that was mobilized during the discharge of Poboran proved resilient enough to bring the two most prominent communists in Anina – Raica and Boicu – to loggerheads throughout much of 1946. To end the conflict, workers’ sense of entitlement was framed by party delegates as an “abuse of libertinism” (*abuz de libertinism*), which might have denoted – *pace* the improper use of the word libertinism in this context – an abuse of liberty.⁷⁷

The ability to decipher the meaning lodged behind such phrases takes us a step closer towards understanding what practices the communist party silenced

75 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, pp. 46–106. Trucks were used for, among other things, transporting wood stolen from UDR’s forestry domains. During one such episode, workers led by Raica attacked UDR’s rangers and burned their files which contained the names of the local population accused of stealing wood. ANCS, Parchetul Tribunalului Caraș, 426/1946, pp. 2–13.

76 ANR, UDR, 133/1945, pp. 8–13.

77 ANCS, PMR Caraș, 25/1945, p. 141. The conflict ended with the demotion of Raica and the resignation of Boicu, the latter moving to a management position with the Jiu Valley mining company in early 1947. The use of “libertinism” in this party document should not necessarily be seen just as another proof of low literacy levels among communist cadres, but rather as an expression of uneasiness before the task of naming “liberty” something which had to be repressed.

and what those practices meant for workers in various contexts. This does not, however, quite explain why engineer Constantin Aman was expelled from the party. In order to solve this riddle, we need to return once more to the verdict delivered to him by the Central Party College. In his effort to avoid the spilling of blood after the arrest of the strikers, Aman not only visited the jailed and brought them food, but also “became an intermediary for the negotiations (*intermediar de tratative*) between the strikers and the [communist] party committee.”⁷⁸ By assuming the position of the *porte-parole* in this way, the engineer unwittingly posed the fundamental political question of representation. Following Pierre Bourdieu, we may ground this question in the following antinomy: in order to constitute themselves as a group, to be visible, garner a voice and be listened to, the dominated must let themselves be dispossessed by the *porte-parole*, a process which is achieved through the act replete with theological niceties of delegation. The *porte-parole*, then, speaks for and instead of the group, a distinction blurred by the very logic of representation:

The spokesperson [*porte-parole*] appropriates not only the words of the group of non-professionals, that is, most of the time, its silence, but also the very power of that group, which he helps to produce by lending it a voice recognized as legitimate in the political field.⁷⁹

Bourdieu further argued that the antinomy was proper to the dominated, seldom to the dominant, with the only exception of “times of restoration which follow great crises”.⁸⁰ It is perfectly reasonable to suppose Bourdieu might have imagined postwar France as an epoch of restoration, one in which the dominant had to openly compete for dispossession and appropriation with varying oppositional political forces emerging from the Maquis such as the French Communist Party. Moreover, it is equally reasonable to suppose this bitter struggle left the rules of the French political field unaltered and led in the course of a decade to a complete restoration.⁸¹ Outside of these post-crisis epochs, during periods

⁷⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 190.

⁸⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, “La délégation et le fétichisme politique”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 52–53, 1984, 49.

⁸¹ This supposition speaks to the recent consensus in the historiography of postwar Western Europe, see Martin Conway, “The Rise and Fall of Western Europe’s Democratic Age, 1945–1973”, *Contemporary European History*, No. 1, 2004, 67–88. Conway argued that the working-classes emerged severely weakened from the war, a fact which allowed for a swift restoration of the political order under the alliance of rural producers and middle-classes. The argument originates in Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium. Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

of secured legitimacy and comforting stability (betokened here by the use of the word “silence”) the dominant may grant a margin of *laissez-faire* in matters of representation to the dominated, thus reinforcing the rules of the political field. Transposed to postwar Eastern Europe, the antinomy reveals a patently different historical conjuncture: here national communist parties emerging from geopolitical settlements changed the dynamic of the political field by their early control of the government without, however, having previously anchored themselves in working-class constituencies. This peculiarity of the postwar period in Eastern Europe, one all the more striking in Romania, placed the antinomy firmly on the side of communist party bosses, thus making the question of representation vital to the development of the communist party as simultaneously a party in power and a mass organization.⁸² Who spoke for and instead of the workers was first and foremost a key issue of party-building since it was the dominant rather than simply the dominated that needed to constitute itself into a group and identify reliable spokespersons. The strike in Anina, then, was an instance of this intricate process that returned – fleetingly through the figure of Aman – the voice back to workers. The “organizing of difference” and the “question of representation” help illuminate the development of the Romanian Communist Party in the postwar period from two congruent angles: firstly, it reveals the party as a meaning-making machine “in the making”, one which fed on and reordered existing cultural practices in a multiplicity of interconnected social spaces, from factories and industrial communities to villages and farms; secondly, it shows the party was liable to be dispossessed by its own rank-and-file, most commonly in episodes of labor unrest. This allows for an understanding of the development of the party both in its relation to the restructuring of the political field and the transformation of social life.⁸³

82 It was Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej who best formulated the antinomy of the dominant. He was often quoted for making it clear that the mission of the communists is to “bridge the gap between political influence and organizational capacity; that is say to lift the party to the level of influence it already enjoyed.”; ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 105/1945, p. 3.

83 By contrast, efforts to analyze the development of the communist party exclusively in terms of statistical categories such as “workers”, “peasants” or “intellectuals”, apart from reproducing the self-understanding of the party itself, end up proposing a history with both the people and their everyday politics left out. One such example is Cătălin Augustin Stoica, “Once Upon a Time There Was a Big Party: The Social Bases of the Romanian Communist Party (Part I)”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2005, 686 – 716.

2.4 Contract and Backwardness

Writing in the 1960s, well after the completion of the Stalinist revolution in production in East Central Europe, communist party historians in Romania found CGM's decision to implement collective labor contracts in late 1945 barely comprehensible. It seemed the decision typified those mistakes “inevitable in any beginning” such as the unwelcomed promotion of “harmful egalitarianism”. This catchword, often referred to as “vulgar egalitarianism” or simply “egalitarianism”, was the rallying cry behind Stalin's own struggle to force income inequality on the Soviet society in the aftermath of the NEP. In the Soviet Union during the early 1930s, the revolution in production imposed a strict hierarchy of industries, with the “leading” ones at the core (metallurgy, mining etc); a wage system based on linking growth to wage via premiums and bonuses and the revaluing of skill, by way of rewarding those among the workers able to sustain an intensified pace of work.⁸⁴ This basic outline was replicated in Romania as well, but only in conjunction with the monetary reform of 1947. Contemplated from the standpoint of this great transformation, then, the collective labor contracts of 1945/1946 were indeed full of mistakes. According to this official party historiography, rather than making a hierarchy of industries, CGM's policy leveled them out so that miners, metal and oil workers ended up earning as much as workers in the light industry. Moreover, rather than revaluing skill, wage differentials were annulled within factories so that “all employees profited equally, irrespective of their skill and responsibility”.⁸⁵ Finally, alongside wage premiums, the collective labor contracts also saw the proliferation of hidden, non-monetarized forms of payment such as, for instance, the practice common to textile factories to give away a share of their products to workers.

It certainly seemed anything but a mistake in November 1945 when CGM drafted the policy on collective contracts. On the contrary, the contracts were

84 The literature on the Stalinist revolution in production in URSS is too vast to quote. For a recent attempt to trace its impact on the Soviet periphery, see Andrew Sloin, “The Politics of Crisis: Economy, Ethnicity, and Trotskyism in Belorussia”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2014, 51–76. For how the “proper relationship between pay levels, qualifications, and difficulty of labor” inherited from the 1930s was challenged by Khrushchev's reforms of the late 1950s, see Kristy Ironside, “The Value of a Ruble: A Social History of Money in Postwar Soviet Russia, 1945–1964” (PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2014), 119–143.

85 Teofil Hăgan, “Lupta sindicatelor sub conducerea P.C.R. pentru îmbunătățirea condițiilor materiale ale oamenilor muncii (6 martie 1945–30 decembrie 1947)”, *Acta Musei Napocensis*, Vol. II, 1965, 616. Hăgan had a poor understanding of the actual content of these collective labor contracts and their impact on industry, but the thrust of his criticism remained impeccably Stalinist.

hailed as the first major departure from the wartime labor regime and its logic of the “wage regions” (*regiuni de salarizare*). As shown in the previous chapter, once the General Commissariat for Prices acquired the right to centrally plan industrial wages in 1942, it proceeded to parcel out the sovereign territory into distinct “wage regions” in accordance with an equally centrally planned cost of living grafted on the rural/urban divide. In addition, after the war ended, it became harder to keep workers in place, particularly in the context of massive population displacements, re-settlement and de-mobilization.⁸⁶ Factories located in regions deemed rural were therefore severely disadvantaged. Commenting on the new contracts in early December 1945, communist party boss Chivu Stoica could not be more explicit when he noted:

Up until now, you could see that the same skilled workers employed in the same branch of industry but in different factories earned different wages even though they were equally qualified and worked equally hard. This new collective labor contract says: from Bucharest to Corabia and Iași, the turner will have the same salary, provided the length in service.⁸⁷

Leveling the sovereign territory by abolishing “wage regions” was one solution, yet one which could hardly address the problems experienced by large-scale factories. Industrial mammoths such as Malaxa or UDR already paid the highest salaries but were still hemorrhaging workers by the day. An inquiry conducted by the Metal-Chemical Trade-Union in November 1945 revealed the steel mill in Reșița had lost over 20% of its workforce since the beginning of the year, of which 1,338 were highly skilled workers of German origin deported to the Soviet Union. In Bucharest the situation was less dramatic; Malaxa Works saw over 770 of its workers leave during the months immediately after Germany’s defeat but could find an equal number of replacements, no doubt at the expense of the smaller metallurgical factories located in the capital city.⁸⁸ These factories and many others in the cities of Arad, Brașov or Galați were crucial for the effort to pay reparations to the Soviet Union. Much of the heavy industry, therefore, was busy patching up trains, trucks and ships, or simply manufacturing a whole array of products for the Soviets, often under their direct supervision. This was an overall context in which skilled metalworkers could still opt to

⁸⁶ For the extent of these phenomena, see the exceptionally well researched study by Dumitru Șandru, *Mișcări de populație în România (1940–1948)*, (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003). For the larger context, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In Wars Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–34.

⁸⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, p. 32.

⁸⁸ ANR, MM, 903/1945, pp. 2–30.

find better work with the national railroad company (CFR) – where their employment would be regulated by statutes rather than contracts, or they could moonlight with small private workshops.⁸⁹

To combat labor turnover, the new collective labor contract operated a subtle change in the understanding of the wage. Firstly, *pace* party historiography, it did retain and even expand a system of premiums and bonuses linked not only to performance but more importantly to seniority and job frequency.⁹⁰ Secondly, the collective contract inaugurated a distinction between the “economic” and the “social” wage. In the postwar epoch – it was argued – wages could no longer emerge out of the free competition between firms but should rather reflect the “real needs” of the workers.⁹¹ This type of reasoning was itself shaped by the rampant inflation of the period that had real wages plummeting. What the “social” referred to was the fact that wages should include, alongside cash money, a number of subsidized benefits supported by the factories: transportation, electricity, firewood, meals at the canteen, and not least subsidized consumer items provided through factory stores (*economate*).

None of these so-called benefits were new. Previous collective contracts featured them prominently, even as recently as April 1945 when many companies in metallurgy, mining and the oil industry signed contracts with their employees.⁹² What was new was the incorporation of the benefits into the wage so that workers could ask for monetary compensation every time their employers failed to make available the prescribed range of goods. This was arguably the most practical solution, albeit a temporary one, to defend real wages and socialize the costs of the inflationary spiral.⁹³ The wage system that emerged out of this trans-

89 The Soviets complained constantly about the high wages earned by CFR employees in comparison to those given to workers of the core industries engaged in reparations; ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 81/1946, p. 2. Their solution was the leveling out of wages through premiums and bonuses. During a strike that took place in May 1946 in the port city of Galați on the Danube, dockworkers under Soviet supervision asked for their wages to reach the level of those paid to CFR workers; ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 37/1946, p. 12.

90 Emilian Angheliu, “Încheierea contractelor colective”, *Revista Muncii*, II, NO. 3–4, February 1946, 12–13.

91 M.F. Economu, “Tentația câștigurilor ușoare”, *Finanțe și industrie*, XIII, No. 281, December 1945.

92 One CGM leader, for instance, thought the contracts merely legalized what many workers were already accustomed to receiving, ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 10/1946, p. 17.

93 See also Charles S. Maier, “The Postwar Social Contract”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 50, 1996, 148–156. Maier distinguishes two periods of post-WWII Western Europe; the first (1944–1947) corresponded to a defense of real wages by comprehensive redistribution of social product (via social policy and labor militancy) against rampant inflation; the second (roughly after 1948) was characterized by attempts to reconcile labor and capital around

formation, however, was anything but transparent. In June 1946, UDR's management calculated that for every 1000 lei paid on wages, no less than 1650 lei were spent on benefits and subsequently asked for a "simpler wage system that would allow employees to clearly assess their earnings."⁹⁴ The same management went on to warn the Ministry of Labor about the perverse effects of another key feature of the new collective labor contracts, namely the creation of disciplinary commissions:

The sheer complexity of the wage system and the relentless surge of market prices for consumer goods created an atmosphere of unrest which did not allow for discipline to be implemented in accordance with the collective labor contracts. By appointing union delegates to disciplinary commissions in charge of punishing unruliness, the new collective labor contracts put the union leadership in a false position, at the same time representatives of the employees and people charged with punishing them.⁹⁵

The enforcement of discipline was, of course, what CGM hoped most to come from the new collective labor contracts. The lack of discipline was understood in a twofold manner: as labor fluctuation (high turnover coupled with skyrocketing absenteeism); and as the power of factory committees to obstruct the dictates of management, particularly in matters pertaining to the firing and hiring of personnel. To address the first, it was hoped the "social wage", bonuses tied to frequency and seniority together with the leveling of the national territory could reshape local labor markets and incentivize workers to stay put rather than quit, change or provisionally abandon their jobs. To address the second, the new collective labor contracts prescribed the formation of disciplinary commissions composed of factory committee delegates and representatives of the management. This measure was intended not necessarily to curb as much as to channel the power of the factory committee by having management veto any decision it deemed uncalled for. It was hoped this arrangement would make the factory committee more responsible and less likely to give in under the pressure emanating from below.⁹⁶

If these were the hopes placed on the collective labor contracts, what then of their immediate consequences? By April 1946, the leaders of the communist party were flooded with reports about workers openly criticizing the government

higher productivity and the return to Taylorite pay schemes, wage differentials, etc. In Eastern Europe this second postwar period is coeval with the Stalinist revolution in production.

⁹⁴ ANR, UDR, 34/1946, p. 5.

⁹⁵ IBIDEM, p. 6.

⁹⁶ ANR, UDR, 239/1946, p. 411.

and agitating for strikes.⁹⁷ Indeed, many workers regarded the contracts with the utmost seriousness and began, predictably, to negotiate the details of their application. In Reșița, union delegates reactivated their old practice of calculating a standard of living on their own and came up with the proposal to have their wages cover at least 3000 calories per day for every single worker irrespective of the wages, skills or the length in service of those concerned. To fix the standard of living in this way, they believed, gave all employees more security in the face of runaway prices to the extent the standard of living would act as an indexing mechanism.⁹⁸ The proposal triggered shock and trepidation, notably for party boss Vasile Luca who took it as yet another instance of “anarcho-syndicalism”:

This anarcho-syndicalist tendency – which is a remnant of the way workers were educated during the struggle against capitalism – should be fought against in order to really increase production. [...] This is a tendency deeply entrenched in the masses, and currently reinforced by the fact they have a communist government; they would never have made similar claims against the governments run by Maniu, Brătianu or Antonescu.⁹⁹

Luca was for once correct. The gist of his rant correctly assessed the situation. The new collective labor contracts, much like the “winter aid” before them, were welcomed by many workers as concessions of a still largely favorable government against a background of general economic collapse. Moreover, these policies, irrespective of how they were popularized by CGM, FUM or the governing parties, were open invitations for claim-making, negotiation, and struggle. Little did it matter that armies of union officials and top party representatives crisscrossed the country in an effort to persuade the rank-and-file that striking was “reactionary”. Strikes were bound to take place not merely when negotiations reached a dead-end but also when workers felt entitled to uphold the contract by less orthodox, even violent means. Therefore, the wave of strikes unleashed in the wake of the collective labor contracts (roughly after March 1946) had a very distinctive pattern, in spite of the range of local militant traditions, craft distinctions, the balance of power between social-democrats and communists, and the unruliness of the factory committee or industry specific dynamics. They all referred to the details of the contracts and in many cases they all ended, as was noted of the petroleum industry north of Bucharest, with the

⁹⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 77/1946, pp. 3–6.

⁹⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 33/1946, pp. 15–18.

⁹⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 34/1946, p. 11.

demands formulated by workers recorded in official minutes (*proces-verbale*) signed by factory committees and management.¹⁰⁰

Take, for instance, the wildcat strike that erupted in late May at Dermata, the country's largest shoe manufacturing factory located in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. There, after the signing of the contract in March 1946, workers asked for the contract to be revised and their wages increased. In reply, management proposed the "winter aid" be paid well in advance in monthly installments starting from May so that workers' wages go up over the summer period.¹⁰¹ During the same month, over 2,200 workers of the CMC armament factory in the small town of Cugir staged a lockout threatening to allow no one into the factory unless management observed the contract. They asked for requitals in exchange for the inability of the company to supply the factory store with subsidized goods and denounced the committee for lack of support.¹⁰² Employees of the Letea paper factory in the Moldavian city of Bacău went on to negotiate their contract, but only after sequestering the manager of the company for two days in a row.¹⁰³ Less than 30 km away, in the small town of Buhuși, some 3,900 textile workers proceeded to argue over the contract and put forward a list of claims of their own, asking to receive a share of the commodities produced, notably Soviet wool and cotton. They too sequestered the manager for a number of days, but this time around it was the communist delegates of the factory committee that led the strike.¹⁰⁴ Management opposed their demands on the principle that workers would sell these commodities at higher prices and feed the black market.

Few of these strikes spilled over into the streets and even fewer turned into episodes during which whole cities were transformed into landscapes of struggle. In these rare cases, however, the role of the police proved crucial. Throughout 1945, the small Transylvanian town of Mediaș was a hotbed of radicalism. Local textile and glass workers were singled out in top communist party meetings for repeatedly disobeying union's directives and putting pressure on factory

100 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 64/1946, p. 4.

101 ANR, MM, 259/1945, p. 10. The strike is discussed in Alina-Sandra Cucu, *Planning the State: Labor and the Making of Industrial Socialism in Romania. 1944–1955* (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2014), pp. 81–85. Cucu, however, misreads the context of the strike by placing it against a general background of scarcity and by claiming workers "protest[ed] against a reduction of salaries". This causality, while as plausible as any other natural phenomenon, ignores both what workers said and did during the strike and the conditions of possibility of the said and done, to wit the contract.

102 ANR, MM, 633/1946, pp. 1–52. Also MM, 615/1946, p. 1.

103 ANR, MM, 582/1946, p. 2.

104 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, pp. 86–87 and IBIDEM, 42/1946.

committees.¹⁰⁵ In February 1946, glass workers started to negotiate the contract, complained about not receiving free tea, asked for compensatory pay, for subsidized firewood, working clothes and ended up purging a number of directors.¹⁰⁶ So too did the textile workers shortly thereafter only to find out the president of the factory committee had been supposedly arrested by the police. This rumor – false as it finally turned out to be – came after another incident in which the same local police arrested two workers and “following the custom in Mediaș, shamed them in the public square by beating them up.”¹⁰⁷ Consequently, some 1,000 workers stormed the headquarters of the police in an attempt to release the arrested, and then put a siege on the building of the trade-union commission, broke its windows and tore down a portrait of Stalin. Brawls ensued between the vastly outnumbered communists and the striking workers. The local police refused to intervene, arguably because having acquired “a bad repute” it feared reprisals. The strike ended when gendarmes from a nearby city were brought to Mediaș to devise lists with the leaders of the workers and arrest the so-called “hooligans”. Workers were heard saying they would free them with the help of peasants from the region.¹⁰⁸ The attack on police offices and the communists’ mépris for workers of allegedly peasant origin went hand in hand with their own narratives of the strikes. For example, negotiations over the collective labor contract turned the port-city of Galați into a place where “lumpens, that is peasants from nearby areas” organized no less than four strikes in the course of two months. During one such event, dockworkers asked for subsidized tram tickets, turned against the CGM and openly cursed the communist party. When one of the workers was arrested and handed over to the secret police (*Siguranța*) – where it was rumored he was brutally beaten by the local communist party boss – the other workers marched on the police headquarters and attempted to blow up the building in order to force his release. Little did it matter in the heat of the battle that these dockworkers were communist party members themselves:

105 Glassworkers staged a strike as early as May 1945, ANR, MM, 1055/1945, p. 2. Textile workers were denounced for “doing whatever they want” in November 1945, ANR, CC/PCR, Căminarie, 91/1945, p. 5.

106 ANR, MM, 918/1945, p. 22.

107 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, p. 115.

108 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 85/1946, p. 7. Two months after this strike, Mediaș’s glassworkers sequestered the general manager for three days in a row during another round of negotiations over the collective labor contract.

Instigated by reactionary agents, workers disregarded the factory committee, the party organization and let themselves be pulled into the strike; together with the social-democrats, some of them even became the leaders of the strike.¹⁰⁹

It was far from clear how the communist party ought to have reacted to events of such magnitude. Smaller strikes were dealt with in the classical way: expulsions from the party, lay-offs and fines; this was the case with the miners in Anina in October 1945 or the shoemakers of Cluj in May 1946. Galați and Mediaș, however, were outbursts of protest on a different scale. Where the local police showed signs of reluctance, the party harked back to the strategy of mobilizing its most faithful rank-and-file to fight the strikers – a practice first experienced at Malaxa Works in February 1945 – even at the risk of being significantly outnumbered, bruised and bullied into retreat. When the rank-and-file found themselves at the forefront of the strike, as was the case in Galați, there was no one left to be mobilized. Strike leaders, however, had to be arrested. Yet here too there were specific problems, above and beyond the propensity of workers to assault police offices and wreak havoc on the streets. It was certainly rather counterproductive to have the factory committee draw up lists of people for the police to arrest since in so doing the delegates would only further compromise themselves by ratting on their fellow workers in plain sight. Perhaps it was better, as party boss Miron Constantinescu intimated, to arrest workers during the night, away from the factories and without the involvement of the committees.

Sensible as this suggestion might have been, the chain of strikes the communist party was supposed to contain revealed a much more unsettling social universe. Surveyed from the high terrain of the Central Committee in Bucharest, these events exposed the sheer “backwardness” of the workers. This was no longer simply a question of “anarcho-syndicalism”, of party and union directives purposefully ignored at the factory level. Nor was it merely a question of “reactionaries” plotting to subvert industrial peace, harm the government and ruin the reputation of CGM. The multitude, it seemed, came in many shapes and forms. Some workers were “religious”, as Vasile Luca argued in the aftermath of a strike led by a local priest in the mining town of Petritu. Some were downright “simpleminded”, easy to manipulate and interested only in their wages, according to the same party boss following a strike in the mining settlement of Lupeni caused by the failure of the company to deliver cloth on time. Others were “lumpens” (*elemente de clasă*), workers lacking commitment to their jobs who hung around the shopfloor doing nothing but swelling the size of the “hidden unemployment” (*șomaj ascuns*). Yet others were “kulaks” (*elemente chibărești*),

109 ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, p. 68.

workers who entered factories during the war in order to use their wages to buy up ever more land. From the standpoint of party rationality, however, the vast majority of them lacked reason and were in urgent need of ideological enlightenment (*lămurire ideologică*) for, as Gheorghiu-Dej explained during a FUM meeting in late October 1946, among workers “the confusion is so great that any instruction coming from us is overinterpreted in as many ways as possible.”¹¹⁰

This language of backwardness was an explicit attempt to “organize difference” in Sewell’s sense: by reading cultural inferiority and political subalternity into the empirical detail, the backward worker appeared to be joining strikes out of a mêlée of religious beliefs, questionable work ethics, shortsighted interests, naiveté, land ownership and an overall lack of political judgment. The language of backwardness was therefore a rationalized form of suspicion regarding really-existing workers, an implicit social critique deployed from the entangled heights of state power and party rationality and an equally implicit indictment of the situatedness of ordinary working lives. Since the layered conflicts structured by the collective labor contracts made visible a spectacle of social heterogeneity, arguably for the first time in the history of the Romanian Communist Party, they also occasioned the articulation of education as a cultural policy for the workers. It was not clear what this project could have entailed in 1946 or what “ideological enlightenment” referred to in that immediate context. Yet the talk about backward workers sounded strikingly familiar to labor inspectors as well as to factory managers who were already accustomed to the pedagogical ambition of the war-time dictatorship, it too premised on gardening “emotionally instable” workers into acquiescence. Let us now follow one such labor inspector in his analysis of a series of strikes that hit the gold, zinc and lead mines of Northern Transylvania.

The first strike broke out in early July, when miners of the Phoenix Company asked for compensatory payments in accordance with the prescriptions of the collective labor contract because management had failed to supply them with goods through the *economat*. It did not take long for what started out as a lockdown to erupt into an act of “open rebellion”: while some of the directors were sequestered, workers moved on to shut down the Electrical Power Plant that kept the mines running. Hurried to the scene to monitor the strike together with the local police, a sympathetic labor inspector noted these were indeed landless peasants working in the zinc and lead mines, hence totally dependent on the company for their basic survival. As the event unfolded, he went on to explain,

110 ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 54/1946, p. 24.

miners proved themselves: “disorderly and threatening vis-à-vis the factory committee, the local trade-union and management. During the strike, they showed a complete lack of judgment, appointing strike committees (*comitete de grevă*) formed from chauvinistic individuals who had their own interests to organize the workers.”¹¹¹ In a fortnight, over 5,000 workers from the nearby Minaur mines proceeded to demand compensatory pay for the total absence of subsidized goods at the company’s store. In exchange, management offered them a share of the profit, and blamed the state for the dearth of consumer items, a gesture that only pushed workers to physically assault the director. Communist delegates “did not formally agree with the strike, but neither did they do anything to stop it”, supposedly out of the belief the strike was legitimate.¹¹² When brawls ensued, they chickened out and sought refuge with the local police. Here too the labor inspector saw figments of “chauvinist and revisionist Hungarian agents” at work behind workers’ backs.

The labor inspector felt obliged to propose an explanation of these strikes in terms of causes, of which he singled out three: economic, social and political. The first was a double-bind: in observing the collective labor contract to the letter companies would quickly run bankrupt; in disregarding it, they would face a tremendous amount of unrest from their workers. The social cause amounted to nothing less than a lack of education on the part of the miners. Finally, the political cause had to do with “agitators”, which, given the patchwork ethnic landscape of the region, were painted as Hungarian revisionists. Social historians would no doubt find it easy to distill fact from fiction within this official explanation. They might well refine the “economic” cause with the help of hard data to reveal how the strikes were indeed short-lived and localized struggles over wages and benefits, emplotted in a larger scenario of sinking living standards, hyperinflation and the emergence of Soviet hegemony over East Central Europe.¹¹³ They would then go on to dismiss the “social” cause as a form of contempt for the workers. Finally, they would follow up the list of “agitators” in law courts and party archives to decipher the meaning of “revisionism” (or “populism”) in order to rescue their figures from the enormous condescension of their contemporaries. They would have then restored a sense of historical justice to the utopian engineer of Anina or the hungry dockworker of Galați.

¹¹¹ ANR, MM, 950/1946, p. 16.

¹¹² ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 45/1946, p. 4.

¹¹³ For this kind of argument see the exemplary analysis of strikes in postwar Czechoslovakia by Peter Heumos, “Zur industriellen Konflikt in der Tschechoslowakei, 1945–1968”, in Peter Hübner, Christoph Kleßmann, Klaus Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), 473–497.

Such an analysis, however, would be incomplete because workers' unrest was a collective practice that produced a collective political subject: the crowd. Therefore, it would be epistemologically misleading, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argued, to follow too closely the law and the police (one may add here the party archive as well) in breaking this collective subject into so many constituent individuals for it was the operation of power in the first place that "pull[ed] individuals out of the collective for the purpose of interrogation."¹¹⁴ Framing faces, naming names, ferreting out biographical trivia, checking lists of alleged ringleaders would only obscure the evanescent assembling of the crowd and deprive it of its collective agency.¹¹⁵ Until this point, I have engaged in an "operation of power" myself, singling out proper names to illustrate how the Romanian Communist Party silenced certain practices and encouraged others in its pursuit of representation, numbers and industrial peace. Between 1945 and 1947, the communist party built itself from the ground up with the help of porte-paroles caught between the oscillating demands of party membership and the constantly increasing pressure from workmates. In telling the story of the porte-parole, I have deliberately ignored the collective agency of the dominated, notably as they came together in spontaneous acts of revolt. The next section aims to shift the analysis away from the figure of the porte-parole in order to explore how the workers themselves undertook to organize difference in episodes of collective violence that openly questioned the antinomy of representation upon which the communist party grew in size, all in an effort to hold accountable those supposed to represent them. What follows, then, is an effort to rescue the agency of the faceless, nameless and headless crowd that suddenly came together in early September 1946 inside Reșița's steel mill and in late April 1947 in the town of Arad.

2.5 Evanescent Crowds

No crowd has ever gone to jail as a crowd, workers in Reșița might have thought on September 10, 1946, shortly after noon, when they decided to "look after their rights in a single group" (*să-și caute drepturile în masă*). On that day, in accordance with the collective labor contract, UDR steelworkers were supposed to re-

¹¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern History as Political Thought", in Jacob T. Levy and Iris Marion Young (eds.) *Colonialism and Its Legacies* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 214.

¹¹⁵ In addition, narratives that disperse the collectivity into individuals and individuals into essences are, according to Roland Barthes, a trait of "reactionary mentality", "L'usager de la grève", *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2007 [1957]), 126.

ceive the “winter aid” in cash money. Unlike in 1945, this additional wage was now inscribed in the contract and was eagerly awaited by all. Some workers even perused the pages of *Scânteia* in an attempt to find out in advance the exact amount they were to receive; and were somehow convinced they must get around 150–200,000 lei. When they were handed the pay envelopes lo and behold: the quantum of the “winter aid” was half that amount, and in many cases even less. Workers of the steel foundry section turned to their supervisor, an engineer, to dispute the amount they had received. The engineer explained it was all a misunderstanding: what workers read in the newspaper was not the amount of the “winter aid” but the total sum that companies were allowed to spend on individual workers, including wages, subsidized benefits and other payments. The engineer also took the angry workers out of the workshop, pushing them onto the street, with the hope they would soon dissipate. Rather than going home, a crowd of fifty men and women marched towards management’s offices, crossing the town on foot, and gathering with them over two hundred other vociferous workers.¹¹⁶

The general manager, an engineer by the name of Alexandru Vellan, was informed over the phone that a large crowd of overexcited (*surescitați*) workers was heading his way. Crammed in an office, it took a while for the crowd to identify Vellan, the face of whom was unknown to the workers.¹¹⁷ He was seated behind a desk, a man in his late 40s, surrounded by two army officers. He was told one couldn’t even buy 50 kg of tomatoes with “winter aid” money. Vellan waved his hand, no doubt in an attempt to create some space around him, and refused to engage the workers until the arrival of Mustețiu, the local trade-union boss, in order for them to talk orderly. The waving of the hand was recalled by one witness as a “tactless” gesture, as was Vellan’s reliance on Mustețiu as somebody who could buffer the tension between the two sides. In return, workers themselves waved their empty pay envelopes and asked for more money as “winter aid”. It was at this precise moment that Vellan was hit on the head by a chair, followed by innumerable blows to the body. When one of the officers tried to defend the victim, women in the crowd said they would beat him up as well, just like they did to Major Staricu in January 1945. Vellan was thrown out of the office, dragged down the stairs, and nearly lost consciousness, when he was finally rescued by a secretary who hid him in a locker. As punches were pouring in from all sides, one worker was heard calling Vellan a “Bolshevik”, a curse word among

¹¹⁶ The size of the crowd was estimated to 300 by an eye witness, ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 44.

¹¹⁷ The most complete report of the event is ANR, UDR, 240/1946, pp. 1–160. See also ANCS, Parchetul Tribunalului Caraș, 425/1946, pp. 1–16.

many others. When Mustețiu arrived at the scene he was accused of being “sold off” to management and knocked on the head with a bag.

The whole event was over in a couple of hours; an ambulance rushed to take Vellan to the hospital, where he lost his left eye as a result of his injuries. During the late hours of the day, a number of workers from the steel foundry section were singled out as “agitators”, arrested and locked up by the local police. It is very likely that those arrested were identified by one section’s “man of trust” who was subsequently threatened by the other workers to be burned alive in the oven for being a snitch. It was equally likely the taking into custody of the incriminated was aided by the local communist organization since two of the workers were “once” party members, presumably up until the day of the event when they were quickly expelled. Early next day, over sixty workers marched to the police station to free the jailed, which they succeeded in doing rather easily. Furthermore, the union put together patrols to keep the steel foundry under surveillance out of fear that there might be future attempts to organize a strike. The crowd, however, remained anonymous since it was not clear how to reconstitute it or how to break it apart into so many individuals. Vellan’s office, it was reported, accommodated over forty workers. One union official suggested to lay-off all those who showed the slightest sign of support by joining in, or displayed any other consenting gesture such as booing and shouting.¹¹⁸ During the following week only seventeen workers were arrested and put on trial for “rebellion against workers’ peace” (*răzvrătire împotriva liniștii muncitorești*).

The unexpected, violent and evanescent character of this form of protest went back, as the workers themselves pointed out, to the purge of Major Staricu and Colonel Boitan in early January 1945. The purge served as a living memory of empowerment, a constant reminder of workers’ entitlement widely used as a threat to management in moments of face-off. The body of the director was central to this repertoire of contention: it could be cornered, sequestered, punched, spat on from close range and mutilated. Vellan, however, was not the brutal and brutalizing army major of the wartime epoch; his everyday contact with ordinary workers was so limited few could even recognize him.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Vellan skillfully maneuvered the pressures coming from the Soviets, who supervised production, the local trade union, who pushed for the contract to be applied, and the two political parties of the left – who were at war with each other over re-

118 ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1945, p. 37.

119 Vellan was an oil drilling engineer involved in developing the national production of drilling equipment during the 1930s. He worked both for UDR and Malaxa Works as a subcontractor, and represented various American companies. He was appointed director of the steel mill in Reșița in February 1945; ANR, UDR, 282/1943, pp. 6–11 and *Stavila*, II, No. 13, February 25 1945.

cruitment strategies.¹²⁰ Much like any other top level manager across the industry, Vellan was repeatedly subjected to libellous campaigns in the communist press, under the accusation of not doing enough to boost production. Why would workers call him a “Bolshevik”?

The employment of the term suggests that by September 1946 workers understood they stood alone against a common front. This common front included the management, the local-trade union, the Soviet supervisors, the CGM, the communist party and the government. Naturally, there was strife and even open conflict between all of these institutions, but there was also agreement. For example, through most of 1946 they all pursued a crack-down on the workers’ right to holidays and medical vacations in the name of production. Workers were suspected of faking their illness or of illegally acquiring the necessary papers from the social insurance office.¹²¹ More importantly, they all agreed that workers’ attempts to openly criticize the trade-union should be repressed. In April 1946, management was called upon to fire a group of “agitators” who were allegedly speaking against “the leaders of the public life and the trade-union” because union leaders argued “we were informed by our factory committees that in some sections of the plant workers are instigated to refuse to perform extra hours, to quit their jobs and to go on strike.”¹²² Last but not least, there was agreement on the proper, nay “civilized” way to conduct negotiations between management and the trade-union, a legacy of UDR’s variety of industrial paternalism. There were clear advantages to this local tradition of unionism, but it could also provoke occasional frustration, particularly when workers judged union leaders to be too inert.

To call Vellan a “Bolshevik” on September 10, 1946 was to link the discontent over “winter aid” money and the rebuffing of a crowd of workers in its attempt to discuss grievances in the absence of an authorized and authoritative porte-parole to the failure of the government to deliver on its promise and the “anti-worker workerist” rhetoric of communist party bosses and CGM officials. By contrast, for UDR’s management, local communist activists and social-democrat trade-union leaders, the crowd was an expression of “anarchy” and “terrorism”. The local FUM meeting held on September 16 arrived at the conclusion that both political parties should view the event as nothing more than an act of

120 For Soviet complains see ANR, UDR, 32/1943, pp. 91–92; UDR, 189/1946, pp. 99–101. For the struggle between the communists and the social-democrats and Vellan’s attempts to calm down the two sides, see ANR, UDR, 200/1946, pp. 26–32.

121 ANR, UDR, 165/1946, p. 10.

122 ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 24.

“hooliganism”.¹²³ One union official argued that the vast majority of workers were peasants from the region who could not be easily disciplined or influenced because they drink throughout the entire day. The Soviet supervisors called upon the trade-union and the political parties to “give another education to the workers”¹²⁴ The engineers and the foremen of the steel foundry section spoke out along the same lines. The reasons that provoked the crowd and had them assembling in anger were brushed aside completely as a form of “discontent” derived from cultural and political inferiority. These tirades, however useful in building a discursive consensus, were not lessons to be learned. By December 1946, it became clear to party bosses in Bucharest that the labor unrest was more complex and had to do with the inability of the trade-unions “to find the enemy” (*nu găseasc dușmanul*) since they could not criticize the government or the capitalists. This inability spelled instability, notably when trade-unions could not offer “moral satisfaction to the people”.¹²⁵ Closer to the facts, the local communist party in Reșița saw even deeper into the problem: “you cannot lead the masses from a distance” (*masele nu se conduc de la distanță!*) was the injunction repeated in the aftermath of the event to the rank-and-file in charge of the factory committees.¹²⁶ Distance had to be closed not only in meetings but also in face-to-face encounters with the workers if disgruntlement was to be diffused and violence avoided in the future.

On September 7, 1946, metalworkers of Astra Arad – a large locomotive and rail car manufacturer located in the western town of Arad – called in a strike over the “winter aid”. Unlike in Reșița, here local and regional union leaders managed to successfully contain the conflict, at the risk of being threatened with a general strike across the whole city if workers did not receive the promised money.¹²⁷ In March 1947, following negotiation over the signing of a new collective labor contract, Astra’s metalworkers went on strike again to demand higher wages, better provisioning, and a significantly higher “expensiveness bonus”. It seemed that this strike would spill over to other factories, but it was quashed rather quickly when 6 metalworkers at Astra were arrested and 18 workers of ITA – a nearby textile factory – were fired for “boycotting the factory committee and the trade-union by spreading tendentious rumors about the labor movement and

¹²³ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 17/1945, p. 21.

¹²⁴ ANR, UDR, 240/1946, p. 94.

¹²⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 62/1946, p. 2.

¹²⁶ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 12/1945, p. 26.

¹²⁷ ANR, MM, 948/1946, p. 177.

for saying they don't need the factory store."¹²⁸ However, the hope of a town-wide, general strike in Arad was finally crushed on April 25, 1947.

On the previous day, workers at ITA had learned about their new wages, set by the collective labor contract that had just been agreed upon.¹²⁹ Sheets of paper posted in each section of the factory informed them that they would have to work significantly more for their already insufficient pay. After tearing down the papers, the grumbling workers left for home. Early the next morning, some workers decided to call in a work stoppage. One foreman proposed to improvise a meeting with the delegates of the factory committee, but the workers bluntly refused. The arrival of one of the directors to inquire only aggravated the situation. By 8 o'clock, the factory's backyard was full of angry workers. One delegate of the factory committee tried to climb onto a box to speak to the crowd, but was quickly pulled down and denied the right to do so. Another delegate phoned the local trade-union commission and asked for higher ranked union representatives to hurry to the factory and another sent for comrade Iosif Nedici, who was known to command some authority over the workers.

Nedici was indeed a figure of influence: a communist party member and the former president of the factory committee at ITA, he had earned the trust of the workers because "everything he said could be done". Much like other delegates of the factory committee in those years, Nedici too felt the combined pressure coming from his workmates, the party and the management and sought to distance himself by taking a less demanding job. In early 1947 he was only in charge of the factory's sports section, traveling around the region to organize events in a car he had borrowed from the factory committee. He seemed privileged, but many workers still regarded him as their leader and turned to him whenever they thought it necessary. Nedici was a rough, foul-mouthed, and "tactless" character, but was nevertheless respected. Even the general manager of the factory, a man by the name of Herzog, told the workers to take their demands to Nedici. When he arrived among the crowd, his proverbial obscenity accompanied him. One young woman complained that workers need bread and meat to survive, to which Nedici replied by pointing to his crotch.

¹²⁸ ANR, DGP, 40/1947, p. 351.

¹²⁹ The best source on this event is ANR, CC/PCR, Administrativă, 36/1947, pp. 1–30. This is a detailed report authored by the chief of police in Arad one week after the end of the strike. Also useful is Gabriel Sala, "Revolta de la ITA din 1947", *Analele Banatului*, Arheologie-Istorie, XIV, 2, 2006, 357–368. Sala's essay is based on interviews with some of the participants, but omits important moments in the unfolding of the event (such as the beating of ITA's general manager) and misreads the historical context in which the strike took place.

It was at this precise moment that the crowd turned on Nedici, accusing him of getting too “fat” at the expense of the workers: as Nedici made his escape, ducking punches left and right, the workers realized they had to go on strike. Some went back in the factory to look for scabs, particularly foremen who refused to let their workers join the action. Others went on a hunt for Fischer, the employee in charge of the factory store, whom they did not find. They beat up one of his subordinates instead. A group of workers marched into the office of the general manager where they wreaked havoc, kicking Herzog down the stairs and assaulting just about everyone who tried to prevent them. The crowd, however, went on the hunt for Nedici; they visited his house, searched the cemetery and finally found him hidden in the nearby headquarters of the local communist party organization. Nedici had taken refuge there along with other union delegates in a desperate attempt to escape the crowd and had instructed a guard to defend the building with a machine gun.

The sight of the armed guard deeply offended the workers and convinced them to put a siege on the building. It did not take long for the workers to enter, disarm the guard and tie up Nedici. The two were then beaten with sticks and rocks, while some workers vandalized the building, broke windows, took some of the money found and pulled down portraits of Stalin. When the factory’s medical doctor arrived at the scene to assist the injured, he was immediately driven away, and so too was an ambulance. When Nedici’s wife and small daughter came to the rescue, they were pushed aside and harassed. Shortly after noon, both Nedici and the guard were dead, the latter stabbed repeatedly with a pocketknife. When workers realized the two had stopped breathing, they proposed to make a cross out of the sticks used in the process, but gave up on the thought out of disgust.

The aftermath of the strike was predictable. One police officer noted with bewilderment that on that day “at no point in time between 7 am and 4 pm, did the strikers feel the presence of state authority”¹³⁰. Indeed, neither the police nor the army intervened, as they were convinced that union leaders would be able to contain the unrest without gunshots. Out of the 2,500 workers employed by ITA, 70 were arrested on charges of rebellion and manslaughter, the vast majority of which were communist party members.

130 ANR, CC/PCR, Administrativă, 36/1947, p. 26.

2.6 The Violence of Industrial Peace-Making

In the realm of labor relations, between 1945 and early 1947 “communism” was an empty signifier in the banal sense that it stood for far too many things for far too many people. The term could be, and was indeed, filled in with contradictory content: it could inform wage demands, labor unrest, purges of managerial staff, and hopes of control by industrial workers of industrial activity; at the same time, the label “communism” was attached to attempts to silence wage demands, suppress strikes, reinforce factory hierarchy and curtail the control industrial workers hoped to exercise over their managers and union delegates. Moreover, “communism” was concomitantly an attribute of the government, a normative if elusive party identity and a popular set of expectations entertained by an army of rank-and-file members, little over half a million. Two years into the postwar period, however, the term had lost much of its semantic instability and slowly came to denote the authoritarian pursuit of industrial peace. This was a hard won peace brought about by the containment of localized, short-lived and often violent labor unrest; a phenomenon produced by the combined effort of the Romanian Communist Party to run the state, build a mass political party and manage an industry geared toward repayments to the Soviet Union, all against a general background of inflation.

In his seminal essay on the containment of the working-class in Nazi Germany, Timothy Mason tried to account for the lack of large scale, concerted collective action on the part of industrial workers during the 1930s. This absence was explained in terms of repression, neutralization and integration; mutually reinforcing yet poorly articulated policies that Mason identified as part of the “structure of containment” erected after 1933.¹³¹ Rather than carrying over this question to postwar Romania, I sought to explain why so many labor conflicts nonetheless took place across the country’s factories and mines. In view of this, the containment strategies devised by the Romanian Communist Party amounted to a piecemeal imposition of industrial peace, in most of the cases at the expense of its newly acquired, seemingly disobedient members. The containment of labor unrest, therefore, even when it was pursued through the more traditional police work, was essentially a form of party politics. Challenges to industrial peace thus derived not so much from pre-existing working-class identities or interwar traditions of unionization mobilized afresh in the postwar context, but rather from the contingencies of party-making at the factory level: purges, the emer-

¹³¹ Timothy Mason, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working-Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233–266.

gence of factory committees, the overlapping of union and party membership and the legislation of collective labor contracts. It was these factors that combined to produce labor unrest.

The early purge of factory directors, engineers and military commanders was a springboard for careers within the party, but it was also a school of claim-making for the workers. Factory committees were the pillars of party enlargement, but they were also used by workers as launching pads for their more immediate struggles. Overlapping union and party membership brought the delegates of the factory committees under enormous pressure from superiors and peers. This pressure often erupted in strikes either with the consent of the delegates or with them as consensual victims of crowds of fellow workers. From a policy aimed at reshaping local labor markets and keeping real wages afloat, the collective labor contract gave rise to unprecedented bargaining over the limits of the “social wage” and triggered waves of turmoil across industries. Communist party bosses reacted by way of trial and error: they harked back to the dusty theories of “social fascism” inherited from the Third International to describe the factory committees; endeavored to redescribe workers’ sense of entitlement as proofs of cultural inferiority and striking activity as a marker of political enmity; and they spoke about education and enlightenment because they saw backwardness as the ultimate source of industrial conflict.

Organizing cultural difference was reinforced by the occasional deployment of organized repression. Both the police and the gendarmerie had done an excellent job during the war in securing a peaceful home front, arresting suspicious workers, patrolling neighborhoods and building up networks of informants in the factories. They were greatly aided by the secret police (*Siguranța*) – always on the lookout for communist agents – and by the militarization of the industry, which tightened up factory discipline. Once the war was over, however, this entire architecture of surveillance collapsed. Moreover, communist party bosses were highly reluctant to openly use the police against the workers during much of the period. Police agents themselves were very often equally unwilling to use physical force during strikes and, following rounds of arrests, they would seldom oppose workers’ attempts to release their colleagues. Therefore, no strike after the end of the war was ever ended with gunfire, as had been the case during the interwar period. Strikes often resulted in mass lay-offs and expulsions from the party rather than bloodshed. Small wonder that one historian found comparatively little *state* violence in Romania between 1944 and 1947.¹³²

132 Stefano Bottoni, “Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional

Invisible to historical research, the everyday violence that accompanied postwar industrial peace-making was nevertheless pervasive.¹³³ Everyday violence manifested itself in various ways. The delegates of the factory committee could react violently to the many requests they received from their co-workers, much like a foreman could occasionally beat an apprentice. Workers could harass a delegate in different ways, and there was a thin line between pressuring your delegate as a colleague and hitting him in the head with a bag or a stick as your enemy in an episode of unrest. During strikes, it was far more common for workers to be beaten up by other workers, either in the factory or inside police headquarters. Scabs got the worst of it, but so too did striking workers who were in many cases physically punished by their own representatives. Engineers' houses could be blown up with dynamite; managers could be locked in their offices for days in a row, molested and injured by evanescent crowds.

It is tempting to follow an entire tradition of research in working-class history and classify this violence as “traditional”, a sort of violence allegedly tamed by modern trade-union politics whereby politically conscious workers engage in peaceful protests under the guidance of their legitimate leaders.¹³⁴ This is an argument put forward by Andrew Port in his classical study of the riot that shook the GDR's Wismut uranium mines in August 1951. The unfolding of the upheaval, Port argues, relegates it to early modern forms of protest rather than to established patterns of union politics: “violent, localized, and more or less spontaneous, the uproar involved direct action, with women playing a loud and prominent role.”¹³⁵ The violence of the event, then, can be explained by the lack of “effective representation” in the GDR, where factory committees and trade-unions were indifferent to workers' claims and powerless against management.

Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management”, *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 24, no. 59, 2010, 61–64.

133 For a case in point see the otherwise informative article on everyday violence in late Romanian socialism, where it is noted the phenomenon of industrial violence was “once a relatively unimportant issue”, Călin Morar-Vulcu, “Becoming Dangerous: Everyday Violence in the Industrial Milieu of Late-Socialist Romania”, *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2015, 316.

134 For a summary of these debates, including the large literature in historical sociology on Western Europe, see Ronald Grigor Suny, “Violence and Class Consciousness in the Russian Working Class”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1982, 436–442. For a critique of the same debates from the standpoint of Indian working-class history, see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Workers, Violence and the Colonial State: Representation, Repression and Resistance”, in his *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143–179.

135 Andrew Port, “When Workers Rumbled: The Wismut Upheaval of August 1951 in East Germany”, *Social History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1997, 154.

Postwar physical violence might indeed be attributed to a lack of “effective representation”, but it was in no sense of the term “traditional”. Rather, it emerged in a particular historical conjuncture in which it became possible for relations of mutual dependence, deference and hostility at the factory level to be turned into claims for rights. This was a process encouraged by the development of the communist party, the reemergence of trade-unionism and the temporary conversion of the industrial workplace into a nodal point of consumption via the collective labor contracts. Had factory committees been deprived of any bargaining power from the outset, it is doubtful their delegates could have been accused of “anarcho-syndicalism”. It is equally doubtful whether men such as Mustețiu in Reșița or Nedici in Arad would have ended up in the hospital or the morgue. Had it not been for the purges of managers and engineers in 1945, it is unlikely Vellan would have lost an eye and Aman his job. Finally, had it not been for the “winter aid” pushed for by communist union activists, and the subsequent obligation companies acquired to provide their employees with subsidized goods, strikes would have likely never taken off.

Chapter III

3 The Monetarized Everyday (1947 – 1949)

3.1 Reading the Payslip

By the summer of 1949, countless moralizing images had appeared in the daily press portraying assiduous workers enjoying the touch and sight of their wages being paid in fistful of cash. These cartoonish representations of the payday illustrated the rewarding gesture of holding well deserved stacks of banknotes in hard working hands, but misrepresented the experience of picking up the wage. From the intimate location of the cash desk, factory accountants distributed wages, not as wads of cash but instead in tightly wrapped pay envelopes. Wage deductions galore were minutely registered on the back of the envelope:

When the worker or functionary receives the envelope at the end of the month, he sees a long list of figures representing deductions. He counts, ponders and remains puzzled. Some of these deductions seem to him unjust. He then goes to the accounting office where things are ‘clarified’ for him: a new subscription for magazine X, two tickets for the upcoming cultural event, a ticket for the next week’s ball etc.¹

The payslip was what the workers quarreled about with the accountant, discussed with their workmates and carried back home to their families together with what was left of their cash wages. The payslip, however, was more than a piece of paper crumpled in disgust only to be glimpsed at in moments of torment and bafflement. It was supposed to become the paper mirror of the worker’s effort on the shop floor: not merely a record to be contemplated *en route* to self-achievement and better pay, but also a predictable guide for organizing household spending. “Everything must be paid for in cash”² union leader Josef Puvak informed UDR’s metalworkers in March 1948. Buying on credit was to be forbidden on the factory premises so that workers could no longer accumulate debts to the canteen or to the local cooperative. Once they received their wages in cash money with the income tax and the railway monthly ticket subtracted,

1 “Nu rețineri abuzive, ci lămurirea și convingerea salariaților”, *Viața sindicală*, II, No. 393, December 18 1948.

2 Petru Miclăuș, “Reținerile din salariu și problema Casei de Credit. O importantă hotărâre a membrilor sindicatului Metal-Chimic din Reșița”, *Luptătorul bănățean* V, No. 1049, March 24 1948.

Puvak explained, workers would finally be able to see on their pay envelopes the real monetary value of their effort.

Clearing the payslip of debts and burdensome deductions was one of the goals of the monetary stabilization and of the accompanying industrial policy package implemented during and after the long summer of 1947. These reforms aimed to reset the parameters of the “social wage” as it had been inscribed in the collective labor contracts enacted during the inflationary spiral of the first two postwar years. Consequently, industrial workers saw the dismantlement of the factory stores known as *economate* and their replacement with state shops and employees’ cooperatives. The disentanglement of subsidized consumption from the realm of production purported to restore the financial balance of the factories which were borrowing heavily from the National Bank in order to cover the costs of the social wage. Moreover, industrial wages were to be calibrated to fixed prices for consumer goods through the priority given to the piece-rate payment system. State control over the supply of basic goods, a stable currency and wage premiums, the communist reformers believed, would stave off inflationary tendencies, abolish the “black market” and set the stage for reconstruction.

This chapter explores the remaking of the social wage in the context of the 1947 monetary stabilization and thereafter. I approach the transformation of the industrial wage relationship from three congruent angles: the reorganization of consumption, state-making and the monetarization of workers’ everyday life. Firstly, I trace the ways in which the double crisis of the immediate postwar epoch – a crisis that combined food scarcity and galloping inflation – structured urban arrangements for the provisioning of basic goods. I pay particular attention to the question of consumption via factory stores, and how this form of subsidizing the basic needs of industrial workers not only propelled the inflationary spiral, but also pushed workers to accumulate debts, leaving the vast majority of them with little cash money on payday. Secondly, I follow this up with a story about UDR Reșița’s metalworkers in order to reveal how the crisis played out at the factory level. UDR Reșița offered an ideal case to communist party bosses for appropriating the rudiments of a local working-class tradition construed around metalworkers’ long-standing habits of bargaining over the standard of living. Yet it also offered them an opportunity to formulate a sketch of the socialism to come, one in which workers privileged access to goods would be determined by productivity indexes rather than collective bargaining. In the third part of this chapter, I turn to the policies of monetary stabilization enacted over the summer of 1947. Stabilization extended well beyond the mere currency conversion operations typical of postwar Europe into a bundle of policies de-

signed to make industrial production more efficient.³ I understand these policies as the first major state-building episode that laid the foundation for large-scale bureaucratic structures for the regulation of labor supply and capital accumulation associated with the emerging socialist state. Finally, I narrow down the analysis of the ways in which workers' wages were monetized. This process involved a brief experiment with employees' cooperatives, the abolition of debts, mass savings campaigns and the extension of Taylorist remuneration principles.

3.2 Mastering Scarcity

Food scarcity was one of the more devastating consequences of the war. For the better half of 1947, faced with the greatest famine in modern Romanian history, the government was struggling to purchase tons of wheat on the international markets.⁴ The effort to acquire wheat in order to feed entire populations ravaged by postwar shortages was the cornerstone of the scramble for food that characterized much of Europe at the end of the Second World War. In Romania, the question of provisioning temporarily brigaded opposing political forces: in early 1947, communist officials visited Argentina to seal one such purchase while Max Aușnit – the country's leading captain of industry and UDR's largest shareholder – was struggling to secure a loan with a New York bank for the same purpose. One year earlier, Nicolae Malaxa – the owner of Malaxa Works – used many of his international contacts to obtain wheat from the United States, as did the Romanian ambassador to Washington. Moreover, large quantities of wheat were to be imported from neighboring countries: Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. The Soviet Union, confronted with its own internal postwar famine, softened its claims on agricultural deliveries from Romania. In this climate, Romanian exports fell dramatically, thus making the gold reserves of the National Bank (BNR) the only available mode of payment for imports of grain and raw materials.

³ For the comparative analysis of currency conversions across the European continent, see the dated but still informative panorama of Fritz Grotius, "Die europäischen Geldreformen nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg", *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, Vol. 63, 1949, 106–152 and 276–325.

⁴ This chapter has little to say about this highly important and sensitive topic. The famine reached its peak in late 1946 and early 1947 and was particularly harsh on the rural populations of Eastern and Southern Romania. No history of this defining postwar event exists, apart from impressionistic, poorly researched glosses. One exception is Florian Banu, "Calamități ale secolului al XX-lea: foametea care a devastat Moldova în 1946–1947", *Arhivele Securității*, 2002, 1–8.

Payments in gold, however, carry a considerable risk. As National Bank representatives never ceased to explain in a stream of memos to the government, gold deposits were essential for undertaking any postwar monetary reform. In April 1946, it was estimated BNR owned little over 239,450 kilograms of gold, an amount judged to be already insufficient in view of earlier historical experiences with monetary stabilization. Indeed, the 1929 reform was pursued on the basis of a similar gold reserve at a moment when, a decade after the end of the First World War, the issue of reconstruction was hardly any longer in question. These judgments were informed in equal measure by the legacy of the gold standard as well as by the more recent Bretton Woods Conference. As late as 1946, BNR still operated with the plausible scenario of Romania joining both the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction, a process which would have entailed the use of further gold reserves as membership requirements. Depleting the national gold reserve was a looming threat, but so too was the prospect of mass starvation in the countryside and the cities. Food provisioning in times of endemic scarcity involved an unprecedented mobilization of public and private resources through relief and solidarity campaigns, policing “speculative” practices, regional intra-state cooperation and the remaking of rationing schemes for urban dwellers. Coupled with surging prices, runaway inflation and the accelerated plummeting of living standards, by mid-1947 the organization of food provisioning became the government’s most urgent task.

The import of grain from capitalist and other countries was nevertheless a hotly contested issue. For the first three postwar years, neither gold reserves nor exports could adequately support Romania’s reliance on the global market for acquiring foodstuffs, *pace* the government’s panglossian hope to export its way out of scarcity by way of cutting back elite consumption of luxury goods: “In exchange for caviar, foie gras, turkey meat and other delicatessen we could combat the drought; we could import industrial equipment and raw materials needed for the reconstruction of the country.”⁵ These were words of despair rather than meaningful policy proposals. Domestically, the problem of food scarcity was interpreted as a breakdown in market relations between the countryside and the cities which had to be restored through currency reform. During much of the summer of 1947, readers of the main communist daily *Scântea* were repeatedly informed about the state’s need to adjust the quantity of available money to that of available commodities: “[W]orkers and wage earners in general are the hardest hit by inflation and lose interest in wage work. Peasants too lose interest

5 “Frâu risipei de alimente”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 724, January 15 1947.

in money and give up on the opportunity to come to town and sell their produce.”⁶ This effort to re-monetize the everyday and revamp the fluency of commercial exchanges between agricultural producers and workers was one in which peasants had to be persuaded to give up on hoarding resources and industrial workers to hold on to their cash wages.

The war had a major impact on agricultural production. In 1942, the state set up a rationing scheme centered mostly on bread and a delivery system (*colectări*) for wheat and maize at fixed prices.⁷ The combined effect of rationing and deliveries had to ensure a fair distribution of food between the needs of the Romanian army and those of the civilian population. On the home-front, however, the rationing system was from the outset geared towards provisioning wage earners, excluding the vast majority of the rural population and privileging public functionaries of the state rather than mobilized industrial workers. Employees of the state residing in urban areas could access rationed and non-rationed goods through newly opened state stores called *economate de stat* which were supposed to be organized for all public institutions as well as state owned companies. In conjunction with these state stores, a number of private shops run by urban entrepreneurs were to be assigned the duty of supplying rationed goods (*economate comerciale*).⁸ The provisioning of industrial workers, on the other hand, fell within the purview of factory management. The law for the regulation of work during wartime specified all factories with over 50 employees were obliged to set up their own provisioning facilities and cooperate closely with country-level supply offices.⁹ Larger, militarized factories deemed central for the war effort were to be regularly supplied by the army’s own provisioning department.

The success of this rationing system is hard to evaluate. It is perhaps safe to assume, as Mark Mazower noted, that unlike other countries allied to Germany such as Finland, Romania did not experience any episodes of famine between 1941 and early 1945.¹⁰ Much like in other European countries, what governed the access to rationed goods and set their amount was a complex bundle of cri-

6 “Lichidarea inflației”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 848, June 19 1947.

7 For a brief discussion of the war time food rationing, see Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al doilea război mondial, 1939–1945* (Bucharest: All, 1999), 89.

8 I rely here on Valentin Vasile, “Disfuncționalități ale sectorului alimentar românesc în perioada 1944–1954”, *Caietele CNSAS*, II, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2009, 219–220.

9 MO, CIX, No. 233, October 2 1941, pp. 5836–5840.

10 Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire. How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 288–289. For the “hunger economies” of the German occupied lands in Europe see Tatjana Tönsmeier, “Hungerökonomien. Vom Umgang mit der Mangelversorgung im besetzten Europa des Zweiten Weltkrieges”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 301, No. 3, 2015, 662–704.

teria combining residence, salary and social worth. Predictably then, unlike in the Soviet Union, Romanian authorities did not find it necessary to extend rationing to the countryside where the vast majority of the population lived and where wages mattered little for the survival of peasant households.¹¹ Moreover, although a richer analysis of food provisioning during the war could indeed reveal that industrial workers came to eat less, notably after the first months of 1944, it might be the case that they ate better. The early 1940s saw an increase in the number of factory canteens throughout the country. Wartime legislation and managerial foresight encouraged factories to invest in the production of their own food, footwear and clothing items by erecting farms, buying land, hiring tailors and cobblers and growing their own crops. This was not only the case for large plants such as Malaxa Works and UDR, but also for smaller factories. When, shortly after the war ended, a communist journalist visited Laromet Works – a metallurgical factory employing fewer than 800 workers on the northern outskirts of Bucharest – he believed that he witnessed the seeds of Soviet modernity already blossoming on Romanian soil. Arguing that in the Soviet Union all factories look like “small cities”, the reporter went on to christen Laromet the “factory of the future” for no other reason than its impressive display of provisioning facilities:

Located on a vast swath of land surrounded by vegetable and flower gardens, the plant manages pig and cattle farms, a well-organized canteen, a house for apprentices, a daycare for workers’ children, sport fields, cobbling and tailoring workshops and its very own mill.¹²

In addition to rationed goods, both industrial workers and state employees had to rely on peasant markets for the acquisition of other goods at free prices, an option inscribed in the very logic of the “wage regions”. Up until mid-1944, for instance, meat, milk, poultry, vegetables, cheese, and eggs fell outside the list of rationed goods. Since this rationing system was centered around so-called “bakery grains” (*cereale panificabile*), the state endeavored to extract as much wheat and maize as possible from agricultural producers, without endangering future crops. In practice, deliveries depended not so much on state coercion as on the cooperation of local authorities and village notabilities. Central author-

¹¹ The wartime rationing system of the Soviet Union has been explored in Wendy Z. Goldman, “Not by Bread Alone: Food, Workers, and the State”, in Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer (eds.) *Hunger and War. Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

¹² H. Obedeau, “Uzina Laromet – Uzina vremurilor noi”, *Scînteia*, II, No. 274, July 14 1945.

ities in Bucharest would circulate both the prices at which the state would purchase grains and the estimated quotas to be amassed in each county. Local government officials (*prefectură*) would subsequently break down the quota to individual villages (or localities) and send out teams made up of notaries and other officials. At the level of the village, the mayor would call in a meeting with the representatives of the village community and proceed to further divide the assigned grain quota between individual households, often taking into account the data on family status provided by the village's agricultural specialist (*agentul agricol*).

This way of organizing agricultural deliveries left a modicum of leeway for the peasants, who could hope to hide and then sell wheat and maize for higher prices in the mushrooming black market. More importantly, however, as the whole operation functioned on the basis of deals sealed at village level, local knowledge was essential for the quantification of the harvest. Statistical assessments that circulated between various ministries and the National Bank in late 1945 converged on the opinion that peasants often reacted to wartime rationing, fixed prices and deliveries by deliberately underestimating their harvests for wheat, even in those cases in which authorities would offer various bonuses for stimulating production. Indeed, there might have been some truth in this judgment for, irrespective of the labor shortages caused by conscription and the consequent drop in labor productivity brought about by the severe reduction of draft animals, Romania's agricultural production was still overwhelmingly determined by climate variations.¹³ Statisticians were hard-pressed to explain why wheat harvests fell by more than half in 1942 in comparison to the previous year by any other means than the peasants' cunning. Allegedly, a more realistic estimation for the first half of the 1940s, one that would factor in peasants' underestimations, would reveal that, with the exception of 1942, the production of wheat and maize remained stable for much of the war only to collapse in 1945 (Table 1).

¹³ Henry L. Roberts, *Romania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books: 1969), 239 *et passim*. Roberts notes that although the sheer number of draft animals, horses in particular was halved during the war, the number of tractors doubled in the same period, reaching over 8000 units in 1945.

Table 1: Romania's Wartime Production of Wheat and Maize, compiled by the author after BNR, Fond Studii, 2/1948, pp. 97–137.

Year	Wheat/Tons	Maize/Tons
1940	1650	4110
1941	2390	3670
1942	1030	2400
1943	2780	3170
1944	2870	3300
1945	1100	1010

Such figures might not tell us much about the average yearly consumption of wheat and maize per household, but they do nevertheless allow us to appreciate both the impact of the collapse of the harvest in 1945 and the larger institutional context in which it took place. While wheat dropped by 61% compared to 1944, and maize by 69%, over the summer of 1945 central authorities in Bucharest were contemplating the prospect of an impending hunger war in the countryside. It was no longer possible to simply count on the cooperation of mayors in securing deliveries since they too were now facing open resistance from the peasants and requested police help to conduct their affairs. Moreover, according to one report issued in August 1945 by the National Institute of Cooperation (INCOOP) – the office in charge of coordinating grain deliveries – “not only do mayors, notaries, *pretors* and other officials not lend their support to deliveries, they even oppose them, ordering local producers not to hand in their crops.”¹⁴

In this context, the political hue of the local authorities mattered little. Even communist party members running the administration found themselves siding with the peasants and disobeying the government's decisions. In April 1945, the communist party secretary of the southern county of Gorj explained it was impossible to gather more than 10 tons of lard out of the targeted 75 tons, without ruining the livelihood of the peasants and turning them against the state: “we ask for our county to be spared from delivering cattle and fat in accordance with the Armistice Convention; we also ask for our bridges to be repaired and for investments in order to give the people the possibility to live.”¹⁵ This was not just a minority opinion. Many other petty bureaucrats and economic experts

¹⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 47/1945, p. 13. The *pretor* was the head of an administrative unit called *plasă*, a number of which made up a county.

¹⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 12/1945, p. 2.

shared the same views on the tension between the need for reconstruction and the enormous burden placed on the country's resources by the Armistice Convention.¹⁶

Calls to postpone deliveries to the Soviets were both frequent and alarming. As early as March 1945, long-time communist party member Herbert Zilber deplored the impact of the Armistice Convention on the economy, complaining in private conversations to the American representatives in Bucharest that “as a Communist, he was not interested in achieving economic reform in a country which had become an economic desert.”¹⁷ Several months later, Zilber delivered the keynote address at the annual congress of the Association of Romanian Engineers (A.G.I.R.) in which he argued that “without substantial help from abroad, the Romanian economy will continue to display its current characteristic: the haphazard functioning of the factories, the enormous costs of transportation, large idle stocks and a severe lack of goods.”¹⁸

Zilber's policy proposals were echoed one year later in a sober report issued by the Ministry of Finance. Here too it was explained that without the possibility of obtaining foreign loans for reconstruction, Romania could only afford to lobby the Soviets for a reduction of the burden of war reparations, in particular for commodities such as timber, oil and grain which could allow for a revival of exports. Yet even if such a plan could be carried out successfully, it would still involve major cut backs on domestic consumption in order to release as many resources as possible for exports and investments: “sacrificing the consumer in the name of capital accumulation took place in different historical epochs in the capitalist countries as well as in the Soviet Union, this being the cornerstone of building an industrial economy.”¹⁹ The Armistice Convention not only blocked exports, it also served as a catalyst for inflation.

16 Signed in September 1944, the Armistice Convention required the payment of reparations to the Soviet Union worth of 300 million \$ in raw materials (notably oil), grain, cattle and food-stuff, in addition to financing the Soviet Army stationed on Romanian territory. For the details of the agreement and the reaction of the Romanian diplomats, the best guide is still Elizabeth Hazard, “Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943–1952” (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1995), 59–62.

17 Quoted in Elizabeth Hazard, “Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943–1952” (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1995), 112.

18 H. Zilber, “Changes in the Romanian Economy”, reproduced in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 67/1945, p. 6. The report is not dated, but it is very likely it was written during the summer of 1945.

19 ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 479/1946, p. 52.

By the end of 1945, with the harvest at a historical low, market prices for wheat, maize and potatoes skyrocketed.²⁰ This surge in prices was only in part caused by the bad harvest.²¹ What also aggravated the situation was the near collapse of the national transportation networks. The total amount of goods moved by rail, water and road dropped by an estimated 27% in comparison to 1939, of which over 40% represented only deliveries to the Soviet Union in compliance with the Convention. More importantly, by the end of the year, the amount of paper money in circulation reached staggering proportions, causing an inflationary snowball that constantly chipped away at real wages.²² The National Bank was not only printing money to finance the plethora of commodities supplied to the Soviets, goods which often exited the national economy without standard custom controls; it also issued currency to cover a budget deficit of nearly 20% which could not be levied through taxes and other fiscal means. Suggestions of taxing the rich through progressive income taxes and expropriations of those who supposedly benefited from the depreciation of the national currency were perhaps sensible, but they could hardly have been implemented by an ever weakened state bureaucracy with little control over the banking sector.²³ This was a context in which the national income dropped by over 60% relative to 1938 and one in which a dwindling monthly state budget for much of 1945

20 Wheat went up from 197 lei/kg in early 1945 to 672 lei/kg in December 1945; maize from 225 lei/kg to 763 lei/kg; potatoes from 184 lei/kg to 503 lei/kg; BNR, Fond Studii, 2/1948, p. 137.

21 The bad harvests of the immediate two postwar years were caused by a mix of natural and man-made factors, of which severe draught and the changes in property relations induced by the agrarian land reform of 1945 were probably the most important. In their explanation, communist historians put the blame on the draught; by contrast, post-communist historians put the blame on the communists and their decision to redistribute land; for the first case, see Costin Murgescu, *Reforma agrară din 1945* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1956); for the latter, see Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1945 în România* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000).

22 In less than 12 months, the purchasing power (real wages) of state employees dropped by 47% according to ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 396/1946.

23 For some early proposals of the communist party to tax the rich, the war criminals and the speculators, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 22/1945, pp. 2–3. For the suggestion that the postwar Romanian state had little control over the banking sector see John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950. From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 556. The standard communist account written by the former governor of the National Bank is Aurel Vijoli, *Cercetări asupra capitalului financiar în țara noastră* (Bucharest: Tipografia Băncii de Stat, 1949) and, in a slightly more autobiographical vein, Aurel Vijoli, *Din prefacerile sistemului bănesc și de credit* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980).

and 1946 was split equally between covering war reparations and reproducing an impoverished bureaucracy.²⁴

Inflation was also fed by the transformation of provisioning for industrial workers undertaken by the Groza Cabinet. Law 348, passed in May 1945, specified that all factories had to set up and finance their own stores (*economate*) in order to be able to cater to the needs of their employees and save them from the ravages of runaway prices.²⁵ This idea was not new. It merely represented an extension of the existing network of *economate* to all wage earners and their families, irrespective of whether they were employed directly by the state or by private business. Nor was it a particularly daring idea. The government could reasonably expect for factory owners to exhibit a manifest interest in keeping their employees under a safety net, particularly in the context in which wage increases were officially frozen. Moreover, much of the infrastructure – including storage rooms, personnel, and also state structures charged with coordinating provisioning – was already available as the core institutional legacy of both the previous war years as well as of local varieties of paternalism. For instance, in Reșița, UDR's management was able to adapt its own so-called Provisioning Institute (*Institut de Aprovizionare*) into an *economat* almost overnight and at little additional cost, relying on an experienced team of functionaries to supervise the acquisition and distribution of goods.²⁶ Other factories were less fortunate and had to allocate important resources to organize the *economate*. Matters of logistics aside, setting up these stores was less of an issue than financing them in the longer run.

In principle, the newly opened factory stores were supposed to complement the rationing system: they were required to make their own budgets, locate suppliers among agricultural producers as well as other factories, buy much needed goods and sell them back to workers at official prices. Workers, in turn, would have had the opportunity to acquire food, textiles, firewood, footwear and other basic consumer items at prices well below those available at normal retail stores or on the black market. Accordingly, the whole project was couched in a language of enmity focused on the pervasive figure of the “intermediary” salesman – the so-called speculator (*speculant*) who would allegedly buy cheap and

²⁴ The Hungarian state budget was allocated almost identically in the period preceding the monetary stabilization of August 1946, Hungary being the other East European state obliged to pay reparations to the Soviet Union worth of 300 million \$; see William A. Bomberger and Gail E. Makinen, “The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945–1946”, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 1983, 804.

²⁵ MO, CXIII, No. 101, May 3 1945, 3625–3627.

²⁶ ANR, UDR, 917/1945, p. 114 and IBIDEM, 106/1945, p. 39.

sell high, circumventing official prices.²⁷ Central to this language was the notion of exploitation, which was framed as an inherent quality of market relations distorted by inflation. The communist daily *Scântea* regularly published a front-page column under the title “The Notebook of a Profiteer” in which various scenarios were imagined whereby corrupt businessmen pumped-up prices, tricked peasants into selling their last ounce of grain and mocked workers’ deprivation. Yet workers were also exploited by their employers, not on the shopfloor or at the cash desk as expected, but rather through the occasional plundering of the economate. Numerous obese, pig-faced, well-dressed and devious creatures were portrayed emptying the stores at the expense of their employees.

By January 1946, there were an estimated 978 economate with a total number of registered members (employees and their families) surpassing 5 million individuals, nearly one third of the population.²⁸ Many of these stores, however, found it increasingly hard to keep the pace of supply steady. While the initial capital, including reserves of cash, was provided by management alone, future operation costs had to be financed through loans. For much of 1945, a consortium of private banks reluctantly lent some of the requested money, asking instead for factories to place their own fixed capital as deposit, a contentious proposal that carried with it the risk of bankruptcy.²⁹ For the banks, much like for the factories themselves, economate were nothing but financial black holes: goods were bought at free, market prices and then sold at significantly lower, official prices. The difference between these two sets of prices, significantly widened by the added cost of transportation and taxes, was simply a loss that could not be compensated for in any way. Moreover, workers seldom had sufficient cash to pay for the goods, and had to agree to take on debt, which would then be subtracted from their wages, leaving the vast majority empty-handed on payday.

This type of debt reduced wage differentials to irrelevance not only because, as one CGM leader put it, “workers had no clue what goes into their paychecks”, but also because it promoted “petty-bourgeois egalitarianism” – a malaise of the

²⁷ For a genealogy of “speculation” in the early Soviet Union, see Andrew Sloin, “Pale Fire: Jews in Revolutionary Belorussia, 1917–1929” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), 126–153. For the fear of the “speculator” in postwar Poland see Małgorzata Mazurek, “Morales de la consummation en Pologne (1918–1989)”, *Annales HSS*, No. 2, 2013, 506–518. Both authors insist that practices of speculation against a general background of hyperinflation were often denounced in ethnic and gender terms.

²⁸ Ion Alexandrescu, *Economia României în primii ani postbelici (1945–1947)*, (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 116.

²⁹ ANR, UDR, 761/1946, p. 31.

highest order for communist officials.³⁰ It is worth examining the logic of workers' debt. The accusation of "petty-bourgeois egalitarianism" propounded by communist party bosses was, of course, a staple of the Stalinist repertoire of denunciation against the leveling effect that debt had on wage hierarchies. On paper, engineers did earn significantly more than even the most skilled workers but since all employees, irrespective of their location along the chain of command, were likely to run debts, wage inequality was greatly reduced. Firstly, debt was intrinsic to the way the economate functioned. Haphazardly supplied, employees flocked to the factory stores to take out whatever goods were made available on the promise to have their purchase subtracted from their wages at the end of the month. Secondly, employees asked for cash advances on their wages. This practice was a response to the equally haphazard availability of goods in the private retail sector. No employee could afford to wait until the payday for securing basic consumption items, which had to be bought in larger quantities and stockpiled well in advance.³¹ Finally, employees would acquire debts to factory-based credit associations. While larger industrial plants such as UDR or Malaxa Works had already opened their credit associations during the war, in the inflationary context that ensued in 1945, many other smaller factories saw it necessary to do the same.³² To use but one revealing example: in August 1946 a metalworker of the capital city earning on average around 80,000 lei brutto would regularly take home on payday less than 10% of the cash wage.³³ Save for taxes, the rest was retained by management as payment of debt.

By 1946, the National Bank was forced to step in and singlehandedly bankroll the economate, printing liquidities to cover factories' spending on provisioning and soften owners' fears of economic collapse. Even the management of state

30 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 9/1947, p. 9 and IBIDEM, 2/1947, p. 4 for Vasile Luca's dread of "petty-bourgeois egalitarianism."

31 As a native of Reșița recalled: "Many (including my own parents) kept in the house the traditional flour box (*ladă cu făină*). Homemade bread of around 8 to 10 kilos, well fermented, was delivered early in the morning to the bakery and taken back in the afternoon. A note placed on the dough insured the identity of the owner. One such loaf of bread would last us for a whole week, even though it was our main source of food.", Dan D. Farcaș, *Hoinărind prin Reșița pierdută* (Reșița: TIM, 2008), 112.

32 Laromet opened its own credit association in November 1946 with the hope, a vain one as it turned out, to spare management from offering cash advances to workers; AMB, Fond Laromet, 9/1946, p. 36.

33 In extreme cases, workers went home almost empty handed. Metalworker Petre Geolfan, for instance, earned a gross wage of 80000 lei, of which he owned 20812 lei state taxes, 22400 lei for the factory store and the credit association and 36000 lei in cash advances. In August 1946 Petre received 808 lei on payday, ANR, MM, 1040, p. 274.

companies such as The General Society for Gas and Electricity of Bucharest complained to governmental authorities of being paralyzed by the effort to finance the economat and asked for preferential loans: "The policy of renewing our equipment, of looking for new sources of electricity and expanding the gas network can no longer be supported from our own financial resources."³⁴ In early 1947, it was estimated factories were able to refund a mere 2% of their borrowings, which totaled by now over 1.3 trillion lei. With no prospect of further repayments, one communist party boss called for a mass default of the economate, arguing this sum of money should be viewed as a form of "help the state provided to the workers."³⁵

Workers, on the other hand, *pace* constant disgruntlement over deficient supply, did welcome this way of organizing basic consumption, particularly after economate were inserted into the collective labor contracts in late 1945. In accordance with this, companies that could not open an economate, notably in construction, had the highest labor turnover. Only in 1946, over 30 construction sites were shut down because workers had no access to subsidized goods.³⁶ Likewise, agricultural producers were largely benefiting from the competition between economate over their produce and grain, which only pushed prices up.³⁷ Peasants could bargain with the representatives of the economate or, alternatively, they could make use of the chain of rural cooperatives administered by the state. When available, the second option implied selling at official, hence lower, prices, but opened up the possibility of accessing industrially produced items such as tools, textiles or footwear via their membership in cooperatives.³⁸

The consequences of this way of organizing basic consumption was both threatening to capital and socially explosive. On the one hand, the obligation to finance workers' provisioning depleted all funds for investments available at the factory level. Moreover, even in the rare cases when the National Bank offered loans for upgrading industrial equipment, much of it ended up being spent on the economate, often due to the pressure from the workers themselves. On the other hand, as inflation plummeted real wages, workers were becoming even more dependent on the economate for daily survival. This dependence in turn

³⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 10/1946, p. 3.

³⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 3/1947, p. 5.

³⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 1/1946, pp. 3–4.

³⁷ Overbidding (*supralicitare*) was seen as a cause of inflation by the government; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 41/1946, p. 3.

³⁸ No history of the rural production cooperatives exists. For a brief overview of this institution see "Întreprinderile cooperative" in *Enciclopedia României*, Vol. 4 (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1943), 668–669.

involved not only accumulating debts to the management and receiving almost no cash on payday, but also the prospect of open protest when factories were unable to supply their stores. Coupled with a severe lack of raw materials, this vicious circle rendered industrial production close to idle, notably in the large-scale manufacturing and the steel production sectors. Consequently, by early 1947, the topic of dismantling the econome was already up for consideration, a policy which presupposed not merely institutional change but also a confrontation with established working-class traditions.

3.3 Mastering Working-Class Traditions

The commercial interplay between the econome, agricultural producers and rural cooperatives, already skewed by inflation throughout 1945 and 1946, came to a standstill in early 1947, after yet another draught stricken period pulled harvests further down, pushed prices further up and nearly paralyzed all monetary transactions. Two congruent indicators would probably suffice to reveal the sheer scale of the depreciation of the *leu* during early 1947. First, the volume of banknotes in circulation grew from 649 billion lei in 1945 to a shocking 48 trillion lei in the first half of 1947. Secondly, for the same span of time, prices for basic goods multiplied 140 times.³⁹ What this amounted to during the spring of 1947 was a drop in the purchasing power of real wages by roughly 75% relative to 1938. Consequently, for the first half of 1947 the cost of living index (rent, utilities, public transportation, footwear, clothes, medication and basic foodstuff) skyrocketed (Table 2).

³⁹ Here I follow the analysis of Costin C. Kirişescu, *Sistemul bănesc al leului și precursorii lui. Vol. III* (Bucharest: Editura RSR, 1971), 54–107. Kirişescu's chapters on postwar inflation and the causes of the depreciation of the currency are far from apologetic and remain the only reliable, if somewhat technical, guide to the phenomenon.

Table 2: The Evolution of the Cost of Living Index in Bucharest (January-July 1947); compiled by the author after BNR, Fond Studii, 2/1945, pp. 354–365. On the national level the figures are slightly lower but the trend is identical, see Henry L. Roberts, *Romania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books: 1969), 317.

1947/Month	Cost of Living Index
July	641.272
June	615.688
May	512.557
April	406.391
March	142.352
February	120.584
January	85.626

The collapse of the currency and the ensuing flight from the *leu*, a classical symptom of hyperinflation, pushed the government to tighten up the rationing system in order to cater to the needs of the industrial workers. A decree passed in December 1946 limited bread rations for urban residents to 250 grams per day or, in those cases where bread was lacking, to 350 grams of potatoes. Rural residents were still excluded from receiving rationed bread, but were now allowed to retain for consumption 500 grams a day of wheat or corn per household member out of their individual crops. Workers, however, depending on the type of work they performed, were entitled to supplementary rations: 625 grams/day of bread for miners; 375 grams/day for metalworkers and 250 grams/day for the rest.⁴⁰ Restrictions on the transportation by citizens of a variety of rationed and non-rationed goods were also enforced with the aim of containing black market practices and price gouging.

The news of new rationing quotas for industrial workers spread throughout industrial communities faster than the rations themselves, firing up feelings of entitlement against a general background of utter desperation. In Bucharest, metalworkers at Malaxa Works ransacked and destroyed the improvised shops that surrounded the plant, assaulting shopkeepers in an attempt to punish allegedly “blood-sucking” profiteers. Such acts of spontaneous justice were not encouraged by the communist party, though they were tolerated in silence as long as workers refrained from scapegoating the government. The situation was even more grim across UDR’s mining and metalworking divisions. In Reșița,

⁴⁰ MO, CXIV, No. 291, December 16 1946, pp. 12936–12937.

in October 1946 already, the factory store was unable to meet the rationed quotas for flour. Several trips to Bucharest undertaken by local trade-union bosses with the hope to lobby the Ministry of the National Economy for preferential provisioning hardly improved the availability of foodstuff.⁴¹ Meanwhile in Anina, miners were starving. In early January 1947, during a meeting between union delegates and UDR's management, miners refused the offer to be compensated in cash money for the lack of goods at the economat. They knew perfectly well that whatever money they could receive would be insufficient to procure food on the local market and asked instead for management to supply the economat as prescribed by the collective labor contract.⁴²

Yet, no matter how depreciated the currency was by that point in time, the sight of cash money did matter for these workers, particularly during the ritual of the payday. While it was disheartening enough that wages could buy very little, the prospect of getting close to no cash on payday was even more demoralizing. In late February 1947, many metalworkers in Reșița protested after receiving empty pay envelopes once again. Indeed, it was this material practice of contemplating empty envelopes that angered workers most, rather than the inability of their cash to serve as a medium for appropriating basic commodities. The management's reaction was prompt but ineffectual: in March 1947, it was decided that workers should receive at least two thirds of their wages in cash, irrespective of the schedule of installments by way of which they were supposed to repay their debts.⁴³ Moreover, those of Reșița's metalworkers running higher debts were given cash advances worth of up to 30% of the average wage. However, none of these policies prevented the fact that by the end of March, an estimated 60% of the workers went home empty-handed while the rest of them got between 100,000 and 150,000 lei, hardly enough to buy a few kilograms of potatoes.⁴⁴

As spring set in, so too did a wave of unrest across the plant. A series of work stoppages and one-day strikes took place in late April and early May, the high point of the double crisis of food provisioning and the depreciation of the currency. In Reșița, over 250 workers blocked the inner railroad network of the plant in an effort to persuade union-leaders to petition local entrepreneurs to sell their goods at official prices. In the village of Bocșa-Română, where UDR operated a smaller metal factory, over 380 workers turned their anger against a local mill-

⁴¹ ANR, DGP, 43/1943 Vol. I, p. 3 and 33.

⁴² ANCS, UDR Caraș, 32/1947, p. 151.

⁴³ IBIDEM, p. 667.

⁴⁴ ANR, DGP, 43/1943 Vol. I, p. 81. In March 1947 a pair of shoes was sold with an average price of 2 million lei.

er whom they attacked under the suspicion of making a profit out of their misery. In Anina, as well as across UDR's smaller mines, workers refused to enter the underground on account of a lack of food. The atmosphere of revolt that seized UDR throughout the spring of 1947 was certainly paralleled in many other industrial settlements. It was not only in Reșița that workers shouted during the Labor Day Parade: "The First of May without Bread and Corn Flour!" (*Unu mai fără pâine și mălai!*). Across the gold and silver mines of Southern Transylvania miners attempted to organize a strike only to find that "instead of bread and rights they got the army."⁴⁵ In early April 1947, the same workers had proposed they receive a meager quantity of wheat in exchange for the 8-hour workday. In the port cities along the Danube, where Soviet ships preferred to use their own personnel for loading and unloading rather than hiring the natives, dockworkers were facing starvation amidst revolt. This was a context in which, as Mark Pittaway noted of the hyperinflationary postwar Hungary "an industrial job became valued because it guaranteed a degree of preferential access to basic means of subsistence."⁴⁶

Yet, while this was very much the case for the vast majority of industrial jobs in Romania as well, even for those offered in small-scale workshops and factories, for UDR's metalworkers the question of preferential access to a basic standard of living was intertwined with a locally embedded and historically informed notion of working-class expectation. Or to put it differently, what made the outburst of protest in Reșița different from any comparable event in other parts of the country was that for UDR's metalworkers, privileged provisioning was a question of tradition. This was an invented tradition construed around the pivotal role the steel mill played for the national industry not merely for the interwar epoch, but more importantly for the war economy when UDR became a powerhouse for the production of armament. UDR's centrality for the postwar heavy industry was emphasized early on by onetime general manager of Malaxa Works – Nicolae Korcinschi – in evocative terms. In a front-page manifesto published by the communist party's daily *Scântea* in January 1945, Korcinschi noted that due to the war, Romania would most likely find it very difficult to import the raw materials and the manufactured goods needed by industry: "In our country, UDR Reșița is the largest and almost the only metallurgical plant able to produce those raw materials and manufactured goods, and in doing so, it is the lever that may either stagnate or accelerate the work of reconstruction."⁴⁷ Korcinschi's ar-

⁴⁵ ANR, DGP, 66/1947, p. 33.

⁴⁶ Mark Pittaway, *The Workers' State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 36.

⁴⁷ Nicolae Korcinschi, "Reșița trebuie naționalizată", *Scântea*, II, No. 106, January 12 1945.

gument went deeper still, for during his brief stint as head of Malaxa Works, he came to realize that nothing can be assembled without the support of UDR: “No other industrial plant in this country can fully produce a locomotive, a rail car, a boat or a cauldron because we all lack the necessary machines for the manufacturing of one or another component. Thus our dependency on UDR Reșița is absolute, and following the war, UDR achieved unchallenged monopoly.”⁴⁸

There was little exaggeration in these words. UDR’s structurally dominant position within Romanian industry translated into a regime of exemption granted by the state, both during the war, when it received comparatively better provisioning, and after, when its vast forestry domains were partially saved from land redistribution under the agrarian reform of 1945. Throughout 1946, communist and social-democrat leaders of the local trade-union in Reșița converged in propping up management’s land-grabbing struggle against the local peasantry under the justification that UDR’s property was an essential source of food.⁴⁹ Moreover, UDR’s workers’ representatives, be they “men of trust” active during the wartime dictatorship or union delegates elected after 1945, were in the habit of calculating their own standard of living. This intricate practice, often directly encouraged by management, was the cornerstone of collective bargaining, and perhaps the only token of workers’ delegated power in a historical context in which ever since 1942, the negotiation over wages was banned. The survival of this practice was evidence of an entrenched local tradition, the lineage of which may have originated in the post-Great Depression historical conjuncture. It was indeed after the mass unemployment and massive strikes that seized the town of Reșița in the early 1930s that UDR’s management and the local trade union found in the joint calculation of a standard of living, a common ground for agreeing over the cost of food, utilities, rent, firewood, working equipment and much more.

For the postwar communist government, however, the combined legacy of UDR’s dominance of Romanian heavy industry and workers’ local tradition of collective bargaining was ambiguous at best. On the one hand, it had to be praised for exhibiting all the genuine features of a supposed proletarian enclave: diligence, hard work, sacrifice and solidarity. On the other hand, it had to be denounced for its propensity to make workers struggle and for instilling them

⁴⁸ IBIDEM. Or, take another description of the nodal point occupied by UDR’s integrated steel mill: “If the steel from Reșița is awaited by the tractor manufacturer IAR, and the agricultural tools factory in Bocșa Română waits for (UDR’s) bridge and locomotive section, then Malaxa Works waits as well, and so too does the entire metal industry of the country.” *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 553, July 18 1946, p. 1.

⁴⁹ ANR, UDR, 174/1945, pp. 9 – 78.

with a sense of distinction.⁵⁰ This dialectic of praise and criticism was deployed by the main communist newspapers of the day every time the question of communitarian welfare was raised in Reșița. Praise was well earned, for instance, when, following the deportation to the Soviet Union of a large number of ethnically German metalworkers in early January 1945, UDR's management decided to hire over 600 of their wives. Even though these women "could not easily replace the men" they did deserve "the same rights as male workers after one year of employment. Consequently, they will receive for free one overall and one pair of boots."⁵¹ Criticism poured when, in December 1946, UDR's management failed to take proper care of a new contingent of workers hired from Eastern Romania: "lacking basic means of survival in their drought-stricken regions they sought shelter with UDR."⁵² Naked, barefoot, lice-ridden and sleeping in the train station, their physical appearance was thought to violate the standard of living long enjoyed by UDR's employees. The article went on to note it was the duty of management to integrate them into the community. Again, words of praise were devoted to those workers "darkened by smog and soot" who, although "drained of their strength" kept production running and overcame hardships galore.⁵³ The same workers were criticised when, during a meeting of the factory committees, they dared ask why "strikes and trade-union freedom were allowed in the past and today they are no longer."⁵⁴

Be that as it may, following the wave of unrest that unfolded throughout late April and early May 1947 in Reșița as well as across UDR's scattered mines and smaller workshops, this double-sided play on tradition was reaffirmed with a vengeance, both at the local level and in the high offices of the Central Committee in Bucharest. For local union and party leaders it became clear that to continue to encourage workers' belief in preferential provisioning risked feeding the fire of striking activity. It was high time to "clean up our backyard" as one local party boss put it and protractedly acknowledge the fact that what made unrest possible was neither simply food scarcity nor directly the sight of empty pay en-

⁵⁰ This sense of distinction was even upheld by local communist party bosses who explicitly went against the party's disdain for wage "egalitarianism", arguing against UDR's management decision to award bonuses to workshop supervisors. Such a position was unthinkable in Bucharest's industry. See *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 519, June 7 1946, p. 4.

⁵¹ *Luptătorul Bănățean*, II, No. 317, September 29 1945, p. 3.

⁵² Eric Wayand, "Importanța UDR-ului ca factor primordial a refacerii economice și care este situația actuală a producției de oțel", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 687, December 25 1946, p. 3.

⁵³ "Cetatea fierului. Acolo unde se muncește cu râvnă, abnegație și sacrificiu și se sabotează pe toată linia", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 770, April 13 1947, p. 1 and 5.

⁵⁴ B. Abraham, "Cum este sabotată producția la UDR", *Viața sindicală*, No. 126, May 18 1947, p. 3.

velopes, but something called “tradition”.⁵⁵ The first could be and indeed were dealt with either by having management import maize from nearby Bulgaria, as it happened in late May 1947, or by rescheduling debts so that every worker may receive some cash on payday. The trade-union was successful in suppressing repayments for July and August 1947.⁵⁶ Workers’ expectations of preferential provisioning, however, nurtured as these were by a local tradition of collective bargaining over the standard of living was addressed in narrative form as the story of an undeserving “labor aristocracy” pursuing its privileges. Take, for example, the meeting of the Central Committee convened on May 12, 1947 to tackle the events in Reșița. What is remarkable about the discussion occasioned by this meeting is the obstinacy with which party bosses portrayed the food crisis in Reșița as culturally mediated. Though, talk of political enemies, notably social-democrats, was abundant, as were suggestions to hunt down and arrest “agitators”, arresting workers was not feasible as Ana Pauker elaborated on the significance of the wave of strikes:

For us it is clear: we won’t go very far with repression. We have to win over the masses, because Reșița has a layer of worker-aristocrats (*muncitori aristocrați*), but the vast majority of the workers work hard. It is one thing in England, where it can be counted on the colonies to support the labor aristocracy (*aristocrația muncitorească*), and it is a different kettle of fish here, where these worker-aristocrats cannot be supported by the owner. If they nevertheless are, then we should mobilize the mass against them. We attack the owner and at the same time we attack the labor aristocracy.⁵⁷

To explain the emergence of this so-called “labor aristocracy”, party bosses appealed to the combined and uneven history of the development of UDR’s paternalism and to the consequent failure of the communist party to implant itself in the region during the interwar years. It fell on Vasile Luca – the party’s most versatile interpreter of working-class history – to tell this story:

Because this was an isolated place and because of the terror, it was impossible for us to penetrate it before the war, so we never had a revolutionary movement in this region. There were also well-paid workers, the labor aristocracy, created by the company, which was very influential with the rest of the workers. This was a very backward region, with

⁵⁵ Carol Loncear, “Fiecare tonă de oțel, fiecare bob de cărbuni, fiecare kilovat de energie electrică constituie o cărămidă la clădirea viitorului”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 782, May 1 1947, p. 5. Loncear will be appointed general manager of the steel mill in 1948.

⁵⁶ ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1944, pp. 95–100.

⁵⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 18/1947, p. 10.

workers leading a patriarchal life. Aușnit built them a church and clubs; the unskilled workers are illiterate. Everything was done to keep the mass in darkness.⁵⁸

The point of this argument was twofold. Firstly, it was meant to suggest that the practice of collective bargaining over the standard of living, even when it took the form of protest as in late April and early May, was the privilege of the few. It was a minority tradition of the company entertained by a vanguard of traditionalist workers. Secondly, Luca pointed out that the struggle for basic food was nevertheless legitimate to the extent it was led by a few committed communists appointed from Bucharest rather than by native union leaders claiming cultural intimacy with the place. As he explained: “if we state the problems with courage, no matter how foreign the ones who speak are, they are not so foreign as not to be able to secure for themselves some influence and authority.”⁵⁹ This second vanguard, once firmly established in the local trade-union, would then undertake to show to the workers that management was incapable to secure adequate provisioning. For Luca then, much like for Ana Pauker and the other party bosses, UDR’s food crisis and the revolt it triggered was an opportunity to appropriate a practice by discarding its practitioners. This appropriation presupposed a discursive reevaluation of the long history of trade-unionism in Reșița that would decouple workers’ expectations for preferential provisioning from the cultural specificities of the place. A series of articles published in the regional communist press carried this task to completion by emphasizing what should be understood by the notion of tradition in Reșița (*tradiție reșițeană*).

The struggle of the past, it was explained – be it against Austro-Hungarian imperialism before 1918 or financial capital in the interwar epoch – had to be venerated and metalworkers were right to take pride in this working-class heritage.⁶⁰ There was no pride, however, in the fact that some form of unionism was allowed to exist under the wartime dictatorship:

That workers in Reșița had strong trade-unions in the past is very true, we can be proud of it, but that our trade-union was not abolished by Antonescu brings no glory to its past leaders, who were all collaborators.⁶¹

⁵⁸ IBIDEM, p. 8.

⁵⁹ IBIDEM.

⁶⁰ Eric Wayand, “Tradiții și tradiții. Noțiuni de care s-a abuzat mult în fața muncitorimii reșițene”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 904, September 27 1947, p. 5.

⁶¹ Mihai Dalea, “Noi Reșițenii”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 938, November 6 1947, p. 2.

The trouble with these union leaders was that they promised, in the midst of the food crisis of 1947, to bargain for “white bread at one’s will” (*pâine albă la discreție*) and presented themselves as the only ones capable of delivering it to the workers. It was not that workers did not deserve “white bread”, for they certainly could very well aspire to such rare goods, but not as an offshoot of a manipulated notion of tradition. Preferential provisioning ought to depend on UDR’s management ability to effectively increase output, as it did in the recent past when “management sent its time and motion experts (*calculatorii*) in each and every workshop to register the pace of work. Everybody worked to the full: from management to the workshop supervisor; from the army of time and motion experts to the foremen, they all shouted ‘faster, more work’”.⁶²

Since this was no longer the case in 1947, so the argument went, the question of struggling for “white bread” was ethically misplaced and politically dangerous. In 1947, “time and motion experts with a stop watch in their hands have disappeared. Time no longer matters for them”.⁶³ Such reasoning, however convoluted it may seem, should be taken seriously as an expression of communist political thought in action. The attempt to redescribe a culturally mediated tradition of struggle over preferential provisioning by linking it affirmatively with a past of intensified work bespoke of the socialism to come, one in which workers will be granted better access to goods in their capacity as “objects of capital” working “faster” rather than as “living creative subjects” negotiating the social value of their labor-power via trade-unions.⁶⁴ By making it clear that food was conditioned on work performance, the case of mastering Reșița’s working-class tradition showed the extent to which communist bosses regarded the question of tradition as nothing more than a bulwark against the effort to increase production.

3.4 Questions of the State

On August 15, 1947, Romanians were called upon to line up in front of bank offices and improvised exchange desks in their factories, schools, neighborhoods and villages in order to convert their cash money to the new currency issued by

⁶² Eric Wayand, “Umbre peste Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 725, February 17 1947, p. 2.

⁶³ IBIDEM.

⁶⁴ For the double determination of workers as both “objects of capital” and “living creative subjects” see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2006), 114. Chapter 5 below expands on these core Marxian categories.

the National Bank. For state authorities and communist party bosses, this day signaled a radical new beginning: postwar inflation would be rolled back, the economy would take off and recover its pre-war standards while ordinary workers and peasants would gain enough confidence in the stability of the *leu* to overcome the food crisis by engaging in commercial exchanges. This optimistic atmosphere was conveyed in countless newspaper articles, all emphasizing the regained value of the national currency:

Indeed. There is less money on the market. But this is good money. It is good because it is less. Gone is the time when people had no place in their pockets for the millions which they received as monthly wages, and when these wages could not even satisfy the basic needs for one week [...] The peasant now knows that the money he receives in exchange for the fruits of his labor is good money, which does not lose its value. Today, tomorrow, in a month's time the peasant may buy all the goods that he needs without fearing his money will "melt away" (*topește*), as it did during inflation.⁶⁵

The conversion of the old currency for a new one was the central operation of the monetary stabilization programs that governments undertook across Europe in response to the inflationary spiral that characterized the immediate postwar conjuncture. National variations aside, the underlying scope of all these programs, East and West alike, was to drastically reduce the volume of liquid assets by eliminating the cash stacks citizens had accumulated during the war and after. In so doing, it was hoped the rate of inflation would be tamed, which in turn would discourage hoarding and rebalance the ratio between consumers' purchasing power and the availability of goods on the market.⁶⁶ The drastic reduction of note circulation, however, was bound to come at a price for it could not but discriminate against various social groups holding large quantities of cash money such as the peasantry, shopkeepers or the entrepreneurs. The Romanian case was no different. With the conversion rate set at 1:20, the lowest threshold was imposed on the self-employed, the unemployed and the retired (pensioners, war invalids, war widows etc.), all of whom were allowed to exchange only a maximum of 1.5 million lei, a sum equivalent to little over 3 US dollars.

⁶⁵ "Perspective după stabilizare", *Scântea*, No. 914, September 5 1947.

⁶⁶ John G. Gurley, "Excess Liquidity and European Monetary Reforms, 1944–1952", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1953, 76–100. For the Romanian case see Miron Constantinescu, *Lupta pentru stabilizare* (Bucharest: Ministerul Artelor și informațiilor, 1948). Although intended as a propaganda brochure, Constantinescu's booklet is remarkable for its honesty in listing the goals of the stabilization and its manifest hostility towards the social arrangement that regulated industrial relations for the first two postwar years, such as the collective labor contracts and collective bargaining, both of which allegedly led to high wages and inflation.

By contrast, all wage earners irrespective of their place of employment were given the opportunity to exchange 3 million lei, which by that point in time made up for roughly the average monthly wage of a foreman in the heavy industry. Lastly, peasants could exchange the largest amount of cash money, between 5 and 7 million lei in old banknotes, the latter sum being conditioned on them having sold their harvests to the state.⁶⁷

This scale of entitlements to new cash money expressed the effort to reach a compromise between the two social groups communist party bosses believed to represent – the workers and the peasants. The timing of the monetary stabilization is telling in this respect. Scheduled for the month of August, the conversion struck halfway through the harvesting season, after peasants would have sold much of their grain (wheat and maize) and before the autumn harvesting of potatoes and other vegetables in demand on urban markets. It was therefore hoped that peasants would quickly come to appreciate the new currency and, with their cash reserves gone, would start bringing their produce to town in large quantities. Moreover, because August 15 was a payday for the vast majority of industrial workers, the government expected this social group to possess little to no cash and thus be less affected by the conversion. This was a reasonable expectation, particularly in view of the vicious debt circle in which workers were caught up.⁶⁸ Workers would consequently receive their wages directly in the new currency and would thus ideally spend their money wisely on peasants' goods. Finally, the low threshold set for the non-producing population reflected the government's economic rationality to the extent these people were either seen as a burden on state expenditure or were simply castigated as "speculators" of sorts, none of whom were to play any role within the commodity chains that ought to link the city to the countryside.

The hierarchy of economic worth inscribed in the conversion thresholds puzzled some experts within the Ministry of Finance. They agreed with the government on the necessity to undertake the monetary stabilization as well as on the need to reconnect rural producers to urban consumers. The grain harvest for 1947 – estimated at 87% higher than the one yielded in 1946 – offered an ideal opportunity to overcome the food crisis of the preceding two years and incentivize monetarized transactions between peasants and workers.⁶⁹ The

67 G. J. Conrad, *Die Wirtschaft Rumäniens von 1945 bis 1952* (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1952), 13–15.

68 See also the recollections of Sorin Toma, former editor of *Scântea*, who drafted the front-page articles announcing the stabilization in the summer of 1947; Sorin Toma, *Privind înapoi. Amintirile unui fost ziarist comunist* (Bucharest: Compania, 2004), 103 *et passim*.

69 ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 494/1947 and 516/1947.

part with which they disagreed with the government's program was about the logic of setting the lowest conversion threshold for non-wage earners. On the one hand, it was pointed out that workers' purchasing power was not the main factor influencing the formation of free prices for agricultural goods. It was therefore misleading to hope that a stronger currency would automatically push peasants' produce to flood urban markets. On the other hand, it was explained that the harsh conversion threshold set for shopkeepers and entrepreneurs would deplete their financial resources and paralyse the flow of commodities they mediated between cities and the countryside. Privately owned retail shops were still the overwhelming mechanism through which urban consumption was organized.

Two months after stabilization all these fears proved well founded. By October 1947, taxing authorities noted with great alarm that due to the sudden drop in note circulation, it became increasingly hard to levy any taxes. As neither the payment of wages for state employees nor the payment of reparations to the Soviet Union could be delayed, the government saw itself again forced to appeal to the National Bank to print money. Moreover, both the owners of retail shops and peasants seemed unable or unwilling to engage in commercial exchanges. Here too, the government saw it necessary to revive the market for basic consumption items by cutting down on transportation taxes and offering various tax exemptions for textiles and agricultural tools with the hope to stimulate peasants' need for cash money. The peasants' blunt refusal to reenter the market in the weeks following the monetary stabilization as well as the impending fiscal crisis of the tax state sent shock waves through the corridors of the Central Committee in Bucharest. Here debates heated up around the so-called compromise between the peasants and the workers and party bosses felt they were faced with a conundrum: they could either push up prices for agricultural goods or they could allow industrial wages to grow. Each choice carried heavy political consequences. Prices for agricultural goods on local markets were set by municipalities through daily or sometimes weekly public price lists called "mercuriale". These lists were displayed throughout towns and were often jotted down under the pressure of trade-unions who would lobby authorities to keep prices low in order for workers to afford more goods. Yet low prices created massive shortages as peasants preferred to engage in wasteful household consumption rather than obey the dictate of the municipality. Pushing prices up would have therefore very likely triggered discontent with the workers. Raising industrial wages, however, was an equally troublesome choice given that higher salaries went against the aim of

the monetary stabilization by potentially feeding another inflationary snowball.⁷⁰

The short-term outcomes of the monetary stabilization might have briefly polarized the Central Committee over the alleged dilemma of sacrificing workers to incentivize peasants but it also revealed the extent to which the effort of the communist government to remonetize the economy was curtailed by structural factors, in particular by the dependence of the waged population on the privately produced goods in the countryside and the private retail sector. In this context, the monetary stabilization raised – arguably for the first time since the end of the war – the question of the material sinews of the emerging *socialist* state, namely the bureaucratic mechanisms, networks and logistics that were to underpin the allocation and distribution of basic foodstuff. More importantly, however, the cluster of interlocking financial and social policies that prepared, accompanied and followed up the stabilization should be and *were* seen as constituting the first concerted attempt on the part of the communist party at radical state-building. The state-form that emerged out of stabilization was not only geared toward managing the food crisis through an expanded rationing system and the development of the public retail sector, but equally toward regulating the interplay between labor and capital. The stated goal was to make factories profitable (*rentable*) through rationalization, with the hope of first recovering and then surpassing the industrial output and productivity level of the prewar epoch. In turn, rationalization covered a wide spectrum of policies, from the imposition of financial discipline on management, selective unemployment and the dismantlement of the economate to the extension of piece-rate, the abolition of workers' debts and the remaking of the wage relation. Let us now delve into the question of the early socialist state.

"The state and its nature", writes Mark Pittaway, "is perhaps the most central question for writing the social history of socialism in the region. The state not only industrialized and collectivized and distributed (semi-successfully) food and consumer goods; at various times, it also sought to remake the institution of the family, to invest in a new nation, and to transform the mentalities of its workers."⁷¹ Few historians of postwar East Central Europe would disagree with this claim. Indeed, the state is so massively central to any account of the postwar transition to Stalinism that one can hardly imagine any aspect of social life fall-

70 The politics of low wages and higher prices for agricultural goods was strongly defended by party boss Ioan Gh. Maurer who claimed it expressed the opinion of Soviet advisors as well, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 28/1947, p. 35.

71 Maria Bucur, Rayna Gavrilova, Wendy Goldman, Maureen Healy, Kate Lebow and Mark Pittaway, "Six Historians in Search of Alltagsgeschichte", *Aspasia*, Vol. 3, 2009, 198.

ing beyond its reach. For an older historiography, it was vital to understand the emergence of the totalitarian state, a state whose authority was said to deeply permeate society. The concept of “totalitarianism” itself was nothing more than a theory of the state’s unlimited agency and hence of the unhindered ability of the new communist elite to reshape the very texture of the societies over which it governed. For a more recent historiography, one explicitly critical of totalitarianism’s explanatory value, the emphasis falls on the negotiated agency of the state. The state, it is argued, even at its most unshackled was still very much a product of the manifold, quotidian and pervasive back-and-forth between various social groups and the bureaucracy. For Pittaway, this back-and-forth delineates a social space best captured through the notion of legitimacy.

According to Pittaway, a focus on legitimacy might allow historians to eschew the temptation to reify the state as an autonomous form of rule severed from the social contexts in which power is customarily exercised. Legitimacy then is to be understood “as a state of affairs in which a given regime’s claim to rule met with sufficient degree of acceptance to ensure that it was able to acquire the necessary degree of ‘infrastructural’ power to rule on a day-to-day basis and thus appear as a coherent, unified actor ruling above the rest of society.”⁷² The focus on the processual and relational nature of the “infrastructural power to rule” would then reveal a multitude of social spaces riven with tensions leading to both conflict and compromise between various policies and, for instance, “the aspirations, cultures, and political identities of ‘actually existing’ industrial workers” or “the moral economies of village communities”.⁷³ In this view, to ask whether a regime is legitimate or not is secondary and counterfactual, though perhaps no less morally and politically salient. What matters instead is the historian’s ability to explore the “dynamic reality which existed in the critical space between rulers and ruled” in order to grasp the “evolving set of socio-cultural values which were influenced partly by the legitimating actions of rulers but also by the attitudes of the ruled.”⁷⁴ To view the state through the lens of “legitimacy” then, is a welcome attempt to grasp infrastructural power,

⁷² Mark Pittaway, *The Workers’ State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 4.

⁷³ *IBIDEM*, 6–7.

⁷⁴ This proposition informs the research agenda on political legitimacy in mid-twentieth century Europe sketched by Martin Conway and Peter Romijn, “Introduction”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2004, 377–388.

namely “the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.”⁷⁵

This view complements older understandings of power that have informed studies of the postwar in East Central Europe. One such example is what Jan T. Gross – drawing on his study of wartime occupied Eastern Poland – famously called the “spoiler state”.⁷⁶ According to Gross, the type of power that grounded this form of state, allegedly to be found in postwar East Central Europe as well, is called absolute power: “[w]hat else is absolute power but that others do not have any? Thus absolute power is produced by the incapacitation i.e. by a process of reduction, not amplification, of the existing or potential *loci* of power in society”.⁷⁷ There is much to recommend this essentially despotic understanding of power. The postwar destruction of “traditional” political parties, of churches and other kinds of civil associations may all be seen as instances of “incapacitation”. Yet Gross’s understanding remains one-sided, particularly in its insistence on the reduction rather than amplification of society’s organizational strength. In this view, the state still appears as a levitating agency hovering over an increasingly powerless society, constantly depriving it of its supposed autonomy. Instead, to focus on the infrastructural power of the state promises to reveal not so much what was repressed as what was produced.⁷⁸ This shift of perspective requires one to pay close attention to the techniques of production that propel the state effect.⁷⁹ Let me now put some flesh on these abstract bones.

In the first part of this chapter, I attempted to describe the mechanism through which grain was extracted from the peasantry during most of the war, up until the drought years of 1945 and 1946. This mechanism, I argued, was premised on the cooperation of state authorities and local notabilities at the vil-

⁷⁵ Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results”, *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1984, 190.

⁷⁶ For the notion of the “spoiler state” see the epilogue to Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Gross suggested this notion might as well describe the postwar context across the region; Jan T. Gross, “War as Revolution” in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (eds.) *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

⁷⁷ *IBIDEM*, 32.

⁷⁸ In practice, of course, the workings of infrastructural power depend heavily on the state’s ability to contain or incapacitate alternative nuclei of organized civil life.

⁷⁹ I am following here Timothy Mitchell, “Society, Economy, and the State Effect”, in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds.) *The Anthropology of the State. A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 178–182.

lage level, and allowed space for maneuvering for the peasants, to the extent that individual quotas of wheat or maize depended on knowledge about the harvest, which was made available by the village agricultural expert. Predictably, the whole process took place after the harvesting of the crops was well over and the peasants had carried home their grain. For this reason, as I showed above, grain deliveries were accompanied by a considerable degree of *mépris* on the part of ministerial authorities in Bucharest, so much so that statistics had to be adjusted to account for peasants' underestimations of their harvest.

Over the summer of 1947, however, authorities attempted to tighten their control over deliveries by collecting grain in the field (*la treer* or *la arie*) rather than in the village.⁸⁰ This was a radical though understandable change: because the harvest was judged to be large enough to significantly alleviate the devastating food crisis and because peasants were traditionally mistrusted, it seemed justified to introduce a more severe delivery regime. This operation required the presence of the mayor, the notaries and soldiers (or gendarmes) in the field, where they would surveil the reaping and threshing processes, weigh the grain, coordinate the workforce employed, retain the quotas, pay the peasants in cash money on the spot and work together with the representatives of INCOOP to distribute, store, and transport the goods to various cooperatives.⁸¹ The redeployment of the grain delivery system from the village to the fields was premised on avoiding any kind of input from the peasants. This, in principle, entailed an unprecedented extension of the state's infrastructural power, all amidst protest from agricultural producers who now found themselves deprived of any room for maneuvering that they had customarily enjoyed at the village level.⁸²

⁸⁰ "Un nou regim al cerealelor", *Scântea*, No. 855, June 27 1947 and "Noul regim al cerealelor", *Scântea*, No. 857, June 29 1947.

⁸¹ The nitty-gritty of this transformation is curiously ignored by anthropologists Verdery and Kligman although it significantly strengthens their argument that "the subject of [foodstuff] collections was the most frequent topic of [state] regulation throughout the first decade of the new regime"; Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege. The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 110.

⁸² Throughout 1948 some local authorities purposefully ignored these prescriptions just to avoid further antagonizing their rural citizenry, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1948 and IBIDEM, Secția Cancelarie, 12/1948. Grain deliveries for 1948 produced mixed results. On the one hand, party bosses were constantly expressing their fear that, as one of them put it "we are at the hands of the peasants", repeatedly calling for the organization of vegetable gardens and farms around cities. On the other hand, local authorities were content with the amount they collected given the situation in the countryside; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 20/1948 and 35/1948.

Infrastructural power, however, encompassed more than the mobilization of personnel and bureaucratic resources in the fields. It also involved the forced monetarization of the countryside through the expansion of wage labor. Once the state assumed some form of control over agricultural producers at the point of reaping, the issue of how to pay the day laborers became an urgent problem. Traditionally recruited from the ranks of the impoverished and landless peasantry, these day laborers were contracted by agricultural producers and paid in kind with a part of the harvest. To continue with this payment method, particularly after the monetary stabilization allegedly produced a strong currency, was considered an extra burden placed on urban consumption since it diminished the available stock of grain. It was therefore argued that agricultural producers should be compelled to use the money they received from selling their grain to the state to pay cash wages to their temporary employees. This method, as a party boss warned in July 1949, risked alienating the poor peasantry. For an entire rural population, purposefully excluded from the rationing system, to receive cash wages equaled a road to mass starvation.⁸³

The combined outcome of these techniques of grain extraction in the countryside was the first major postwar peasant rebellion that swept across Western Romania for much of July and August 1949.⁸⁴ What is remarkable about these violent events – which left dozens of dead on both sides and led to arrests, imprisonment and executions – was the precision with which the peasants identified a new form of state with the new techniques for grain extraction. As one report from the secret police noted in July 1949, peasants were “angry over the decision of the government to pay for the reaps in cash wages and collect the quotas in the fields.”⁸⁵ As a result, during the rebellion peasants attacked threshing machines, devastated the cooperatives, threatened to blow up storage facilities, destroyed the carts carrying grain, and vandalized the local village halls and the headquarters of the police and the communist party.⁸⁶ What explains the occurrence of the rebellion in 1949 rather than earlier (grain deliveries were instituted before Romania joined the war in 1941) is not only the transformation in the regime of collection but also the effort to monetarize agricultural work as a way of boosting grain reserves. The discontent over the interdiction to pay day laborers

83 See the discussion in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 234/1949.

84 The best recent overview of the events is Carmen Elena Potra, “Revoltele țărănești din județul Bihor în vara anului 1949”, Clara Mareș and Constantin Vasilescu (eds.), *Nesupunere și contestare în România comunistă* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 19–42. No general study placing the rebellion in the agricultural history of mid-twentieth century Romania currently exists.

85 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 43/1949, p. 8.

86 See ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 41/1949 for the unfolding of the rebellion.

in kind resulted in a moment of solidarity between peasants of different social standing at the village level and turned whole rural communities, otherwise divided by land ownership, wealth and ethnicity, against the state. Removed from the space of negotiation, the new delivery system produced a state doubly external to the moral economy of harvesting grain: it affected the landowners (so-called *chiaburi* or *kulaks*) and the day laborers equally. This example shows the manner in which the extension of infrastructural power through various techniques of production positions the state as an external entity standing above – though not always in opposition to – community life. At the same time, however, the very same techniques produce the social conditions for revolt or acquiescence, weaving together textures of solidarity or digging trenches of resilience.

It is at this level of quotidian social practice, then, that legitimacy is openly disputed. Struggles such as the ones described above, no matter what other forms they may take at one point or another, are an immanent feature of this process rather than a by-product of traditional peasant values or other rationalizations of *longue durée* cultural dispositions. The merit of this perspective on the state for a social history of early socialism is twofold. Firstly, it tempers the propensity to impute intentions to abstract entities such as the state, the party or society. Rather than viewing each of these entities as fully formed historical actors, the perspective advocated here conceives them as interlocking, mutually constituting sets of practices. Secondly, it widens the repertoire of topics to be investigated as relevant aspects of state-making, expanding the focus beyond questions of overt coercion and implicit consent.

Take, for instance, the policy known as the “rational allocation of the workforce” (*repartizarea rațională a brațelor de muncă*), which aimed to cut back the number of employed industrial workers to prewar levels in order to free factories from “hidden unemployment” and reduce aggregate demand for goods and services. The origins of the “rational allocation of the workforce” policy can be traced back to the first debates over stabilization that engaged the members of the Central Committee in March 1947.⁸⁷ Then and there it was noted that by early 1947, Romanian industry had come to employ over 554,000 workers, including blue-collar employees and administrative staff whereas in 1938 – the benchmark date for the take-off of the war economy – statistics indicated a mere 324,000 employees. If these figures were even remotely accurate it implied that in the space of little under ten years, the total number of employees in industry almost

87 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 9/1947, pp. 1–9.

doubled while industrial output fell by an estimated 60%.⁸⁸ In order to restore the ratio between capital and labor to prewar levels, it was decided that at least 30% of the employees had to be fired and, if possible, redirected either to agricultural work or to those factories that might experience temporary shortages of manpower. To assist with this operation, in July 1947 the Ministry of Labor was charged to set up “workforce allocation” offices throughout the country and provide trained personnel for them. Once established, these offices would ask all industrial units in their designated area to deliver information about their total number of employees and propose lists with those to be discharged.⁸⁹ Although the decision on whom to fire rested in principle with management alone, at the factory level it often fell to the members of the factory committee to draw up the lists, given their influence among workers.⁹⁰ The singled out workers could, in turn, plead their case in front of the “workforce allocation” office representatives, with varying degrees of success.

The entire operation was predictably likely to trigger discontent. The results of an improvised opinion poll conducted in the capital city of Bucharest in late June 1947 showed that many of those interviewed believed that “the firing of workers fed anti-governmental sentiment” because “[t]he government will be accused that it purges workers on political grounds and the unemployed will serve the purpose of the reaction.”⁹¹ In south-western Transylvania, social-democrat workers protested against being laid-off by none other than the local chief of the gendarmerie who was now presiding over the “workforce allocation” office: “this fact will produce general discontent given that the county of Hunedoara is an industrial one and we ended up being judged by gendarmes, the very ones who have persecuted us in the past.”⁹² These fears creeping from below dispersed far and wide. Communist party bosses feared that the involvement of

⁸⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 30/1947, p. 6.

⁸⁹ ANR, MM, 162/1947, pp. 1–21. The discharged workers were entitled to receive one compensatory month's salary as well as firewood and foodstuff.

⁹⁰ In one case concerning the paper factory “Letea”, management was not only not aware of who was put on the list, it was also shocked to discover the factory committee included the name of the director among those to be dismissed, in ANR, MM, 464/1947, p. 1–5.

⁹¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 6/1947, p. 9. The opinion poll was conducted on a sample of roughly 500 residents of Bucharest with the help of police officers at the request of the government. For similar cases of sampling an early form of “public opinion” in postwar East Germany see Mark Allinson, “Popular Opinion”, in Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds.) *The Workers' and Peasants' State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945–1971* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 96–111.

⁹² ANR, MM, 156/1947, p. 242.

the trade-unions in the firing of workers would compromise them even further and recommended that the rank-and-file at least avoid the use of the term “unemployment” (*șomaj*) and speak instead of “declogging” (*decongestionare*) or “compression” (*comprimare*) of workers.⁹³ Euphemisms aside, it was far from clear which workers should be selected for dismissal. There was a significant amount of reasonable prejudice among communist party bosses for the so-called “pogonari”: double-dwellers with one foot in the countryside owning a modicum of land and making a seasonal living in industry. On the one hand, firing these workers made things easier for management and the union delegates since they represented a fluctuating, low-skilled and poorly paid workforce often accused of absenteeism, lack of political commitment and bad manners. On the other hand, glued to their land, it was nearly impossible to relocate the double-dwellers to other regions where labor was supposedly scarce.

By late 1947, it was estimated that of the initial target of 166,200 workers scheduled to be dismissed, the “workforce allocation” offices managed to process between 26,000 and 38,000 people.⁹⁴ This was for two reasons. First, the assumption that informed this policy was misleading in the sense that 1938 could hardly have been taken as the threshold year for assessing the performance of industry in times of peace. In many cases, factories suffered significant technological upgrading and enlargement during the war and hired personnel as a consequence of their newly acquired production capacity. Reducing their number of employees in 1947 to prewar levels would have only idled them more, as factory managers never ceased to argue. Moreover, even with the same machines there were also cases of factories for which the transition from war to peace production required more rather than less employees. Second, and more importantly, the lay-off campaign provided the opportunity for factory committees to get rid of politically troublesome workers or to save from firing comrades, all in an atmosphere of generalized suspicion and moral indignation that had management and union delegates at loggerheads.

Despite such tensions, which were indeed common throughout Romanian industry in 1947, the experiment with selective unemployment was not a complete failure for communist party bosses. Even though it encountered multiple forms of resistance both against the lay-offs and the subsequent redistribution of workers, the “workforce allocation” offices remained in place as a key mechanism for managing labor supply and one of the more significant institutional

⁹³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 23/1947, 75/1947 for the improbable suggestion that CGM should take care of the workforce allocation rather than the firing in order to appear on the side of the workers.

⁹⁴ IBIDEM, p. 7.

legacies bequeathed by stabilization reforms to the early socialist state. Granted, for the next few years recruitment in industry remained a localized affair resolved at the factory gates through informal networks. Yet, particularly in large cities prone to immigration from the countryside such as Bucharest, the role of the “workforce allocation” offices became more and more important in the organization of labor markets. With regard to cutting costs and recovering the lost efficiency of Romanian industrial production, however, the lay-offs campaign was a failure. Not only was the number of fired workers rather insignificant, but as long as the structure of the wage was still determined by the collective labor contracts implemented in the immediate aftermath of the war, there was little hope that factories would be able to reduce their production costs. The re-making of the wage system, therefore, was another aspect that occasioned the extension of infrastructural power in the sphere of labor relations.

3.5 Wages of Peace

The concern with a new wage system that could offset the alleged negative consequences of the collective labor contracts was a topic hotly debated in the wake of the mass lay-offs campaign, not merely during the meetings of the Central Committee but also by factory managers. In Reșița, UDR’s general manager Popp underlined three consequences the contracts had on UDR’s workforce. First, the contracts produced a kind of harmful uniformity since they failed to distinguish between the stable and skilled workers and “the seasonal and semi-industrial, those who have a plot of land and look at industry as an additional source of income for their families.”⁹⁵ Secondly, the contracts achieved a double levelling (*turtire*) of the wages. On the one hand, the unskilled worker earned over 40% more in 1947 than in 1940; on the other hand, the difference between skilled workers was itself reduced so much so that whereas in 1940 a forger received on average 80% of the wage of his foreman, in 1947 the same forger took home roughly 93%. This wage scale led to “such an exaggerated equalization that it did away with the incentive to lead a good life by occupying a position of greater responsibility.”⁹⁶ Thirdly, the contracts were responsible for the total collapse of the piece-rate system. According to Popp, sensible piece-rate

⁹⁵ ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 9/1947, p. 24.

⁹⁶ IBIDEM, p. 25.

norms should allow workers to add at most 20% to their basic wages and not, as it was the case in 1947, over 500%.⁹⁷

The remaking of the wage scale, however, entailed more than the introduction of tighter piece-rate norms and higher pay for the skilled worker. It also resulted in the dismantling of the “social wage” as it was embedded in the prescriptions of the postwar collective labor contracts enacted by CGM. The “social wage” was essentially understood as access to subsidized goods via factory stores (economate), including firewood and clothing items. Running these stores, however, forced management to take out loans and spend them on provisioning workers rather than investments. As the communist daily *Scântea* explained in late August 1947, the nature of the economate had always been temporary, a form of “help our democratic state offered to employees in harsh times.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, it was argued that the National Bank will only lend money for investments in production and explained that the abolition of subsidized consumption will significantly reduce production costs. The news must have come as a surprise to workers and factory owners as well.

During the months leading to the monetary stabilization, the communist press never mentioned the dismantlement of the economate. On the contrary, myriad articles argued their retention as still the best way to organize provisioning, and accused “the capitalists” of “diabolical” plans to close down the stores.⁹⁹ It was certainly shocking to witness armies of financial inspectors descending upon the country’s largest economate during late 1947 and early 1948 to close them down. In Reșița, it was revealed that UDR’s economat engaged in massive “unjustified” spending during the food crisis of early 1947, buying up large quantities of beef and pork meat and thus “blocking funds necessary for production” and contributing to the “economic chaos before the monetary stabilization.”¹⁰⁰ This type of rhetoric emphasized time and again the degree to which the factory stores were wasting financial resources, and replicated many of the arguments against subsidized consumption put forward

⁹⁷ For the same argument about the levelling of the wage scale see also ANR, UDR, 22/1947, p. 15 “We ended up in a situation in which the salary is given in kind (*avantagii în natură*), independently of production and of the role and responsibility of the employee.”

⁹⁸ “Mai sunt sau nu necesare și folositoare economatele”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 906, August 27 1947.

⁹⁹ Emilian Anghelie, “Invenția diavolicească. Unii patroni cer desființarea economatelor și cantinelor”, *Viața Sindicală*, March 30 1947. There were many more articles in this vein published up until June/July 1947.

¹⁰⁰ ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 17/1947, p. 29.

by the General Union of Romanian Industrialists (UGIR).¹⁰¹ Therefore, dismantling the *economate* was seen as a necessary step toward recovering industrial efficiency by way of injecting back into production the modicum of credit made available by the National Bank. Moreover, at the factory level, the disentanglement of subsidized consumption from managerial duties could indeed free a number of employees formerly in charge of provisioning for more “productive work”.

Still, with a vastly underdeveloped state retail-shop network even in the largest cities, it was far less clear how industrial workers would continue to procure for themselves basic consumption items in the absence of *economate*. This question was all the more important in the context of the new rationing law that accompanied the monetary stabilization.¹⁰² The law departed from earlier forms of rationing in significant ways: not only did it expand the scheme to a wide array of foodstuff beyond bread but it now also covered clothing, textile and footwear items. Moreover, the new ration cards came with a scale of worth of their own which distinguished not merely between employees and their family members but equally between different types of work. Thus, for instance, miners and metalworkers were entitled to the largest quantities of rationed goods, followed by workers of the light industries, the state functionaries, war veterans and the like. Yet much like the previous laws passed during the war and after, this law too discriminated against rural residents and even against employees owning land in the countryside. Peasants remained excluded from accessing ration goods well into the 1950s.¹⁰³ This comprehensive and hierarchical rationing system expressed a fear of a rising purchasing power of the salaried masses under the new wage system and was in principle supposed to hold at bay inflationary tendencies, thereby anticipating an upsurge in real wages. The sudden closing down of the factory stores, however, directly questioned the likelihood of the rationed goods reaching their consumers.

The solution proposed in late August 1947 – one remarkable for its immediate failure – was the creation of autonomous employees’ cooperatives. The

101 UGIR was so puzzled by the unexpected decision of the communist government to abolish the factory stores in August 1947 that it even sent a memo to the Ministry of Industry in order to inquire about whether this policy was real or not and asked for workers to be obliged to pay the full price of a meal at the canteen; ANR, Ministerul Industriei, 8/1947, p. 170.

102 Law 308, M.O. CXV, No. 200, September 1 1947.

103 See the detailed discussion of the implications of this rationing system for the Romanian rural social universe in Mircea Scrob, “From Mămăligă to Bread as the ‘Core’ Food of Romanian Villagers. A Consumer-Centered Interpretation of a Dietary Change (1900 – 1980)” (PhD Dissertation, Department of History, CEU, 2015), 130 – 133.

idea was not without precedent. As we have seen in the first chapter, UDR's metalworkers set up their own cooperative in the aftermath of the Great Depression through which they hoped to control price fluctuations at local peasant markets by bringing cheaper goods into town. It is not clear how widespread such initiatives were in the interwar period. In Bucharest, an allegedly "old social-democrat" cooperative called "Victoria" was revived with the help of CGM in early 1945 and catered to its members at official prices. This cooperative, however, was hardly a success story: its three small shops scattered across the city were almost always empty due to the competition from factory stores, which were willing and able to pay more on whatever goods were available during the postwar food crisis.¹⁰⁴ What the new employees' cooperatives would retain from this historical experience was the mutualist principle on which such an institution was based: employees from different factories would brigade on a residential rather than factory base, pay their deposits (*parte socială*) and membership fees (*cotizație*) and expect for the cooperatives to deliver them various goods. Moreover, cooperatives would inherit much of the logistic underpinning the economate, including their unsold stocks, vehicles and some personnel. Unlike the economate, cooperatives' capital was made up from their members' deposits and fees.¹⁰⁵

Conceived as "voluntary associations", employees' cooperatives were to become a "weapon against intermediaries", replacing the factory stores and supplementing an emergent public retail-shops network.¹⁰⁶ Employees' cooperatives were an explicit attempt to excise the state from the wage relation by placing the costs of organizing provisioning on the workers themselves. Neither the government through bank loans nor the factories out of their own funds would subsidize workers' basic needs. The epoch of collective bargaining over provisioning, with its strikes, sequestrations and outbursts of violence, was over. Replacing the economate with "voluntary associations", however, was easier said than done. For the two months following stabilization, no less than 45% of the credit grant-

104 For instance, in 1945 "Victoria" bought eggs from Bulgaria; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 95/1945, p. 11–13. One of its shops was located close to Malaxa Works, according to its one-time employee Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România* (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 24.

105 "Problema cooperativelor", *Scântea*, XVI, No. 919, September 11 1947.

106 "Cooperativele, mijloc de îmbunătățirea a situației salariaților", *Viața Sindicală*, September 14 1947.

ed by the National Bank was spent on wages rather than investments.¹⁰⁷ Yet it was the sheer lack of cash money on the part of the workers that doomed this project from the outset. By early 1948, there were 38 cooperatives in Bucharest alone with a membership exceeding 313,000 employees, and 202 cooperatives across the country totaling over 711,000 members.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, very few of these cooperatives actually functioned, and those that did were themselves facing bankruptcy. Not only were they heavily underfinanced, as few of their members could afford to pay their fees, they also lacked the logistical means to transport and store basic goods such as vegetables or meat. It was no surprise that by the end of the year the cooperative experiment was considered unfeasible and had to be overtaken by an emergent state retail sector.¹⁰⁹

Nor was the total externalization of provisioning costs outside of the factory a resounding success. By early 1950, a governmental decree urged factories to organize vegetable gardens and pig farms, for which the National Bank would provide credit. Managers were instructed to feed their livestock without “recourse to the market” and make extensive use of voluntary, unpaid work by its employees for servicing the gardens and farms.¹¹⁰ This project, which resembled similar plans attempted during the war, was complemented in late 1952 by an additional decree that forced local municipalities in industrial areas such as Reșița or the Jiu Valley to organize their own vegetable gardens and cater for the local population.¹¹¹ And then there were the factory canteens, the supply of which remained an obligation of management even though here too, beginning with late 1947, workers were made to pay the full price of their meals.¹¹²

Paying in cash at the canteen, or for firewood, was a consequence of this transformation in provisioning and a precondition for the implementation of the new wage system. What it amounted to was a complete monetarization of

107 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 32/1947, p. 20. Controlling what factories did with their bank loans remained an issue even after the creation of a specialized bank for investments (Banca de credit pentru investiții) in 1948; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 45/1949.

108 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 16/1948, pp. 24–27.

109 Unlike the cooperatives, the state stores called “Alimentara” would be opened to all, selling both rationed and non-rationed goods. In Bucharest, some of them were inaugurated on November 7 1948 to celebrate the Revolution, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 30/1948, p. 22.

110 On how this decree was interpreted at the factory level, see AMB, Fond Laromet, 8/1947, pp. 13–19.

111 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 40/1952. More on this in chapter 5 below.

112 “Să luptăm pentru îmbunătățirea cantinelor”, *Viața Sindicală*, December 14 1947. For Reșița see Petru Miclăuș, “Reținerile din salariu și problema Casei de Credit. O importantă hotărâre a membrilor sindicatului Metal-Chimic din Reșița”, *Luptătorul bănățean*, No. 1049, March 24 1948.

the workers' everyday life – a process which had to overcome the regime of debts workers had become accustomed to during the immediate postwar years and allow for the recovery of the value of cash money for working-class households. It was only against a monetarized everyday that a more hierarchical, performance-based wage system could be implemented.

Monetarization proceeded at a slow pace. A national “price slash” enacted in October 1948 revealed that workers' wages were still plagued by debts that left many with little money to seize the chance of buying cheaper goods.¹¹³ This was hardly surprising for despite the complaints it provoked on payday, the regime of debts had its clear advantages. Consider the issue of firewood – the main fuel available for household heating. In line with the policy of shifting the costs of provisioning from the factories and the National Bank onto the workers, in early 1949, the Ministry of Finance decided to do away with the “debt system and the monthly installments subtracted through pay lists”¹¹⁴ from the employees by the management. Instead, it was a newly created state company – Comlemn – that would run the firewood provisioning in the major cities, organizing storage facilities and expecting workers to pay in cash (*din mână*). Factories would then be freed from the duty of supplying their employees with firewood and saved from having to retain parts of their salaries as debt.

This decision triggered mixed feelings among workers.¹¹⁵ During a meeting convened by CGM in Bucharest in May 1949, the vast majority of workers invited to comment on the decision expressed their desire to stick to the old system of debts. As one foreman employed by Malaxa Works – comrade Abramovici – put it: “In the old days we took firewood on pay lists and [the factory] retained our debts. Nobody really complained and I believe that now we should do the same; this would be good.”¹¹⁶ Other workers did welcome the opportunity to get rid of debts, but feared this would only favor the well paid, those earning enough to be able to first pay off their old debts, in addition to affording firewood. The problem of debts was finally settled a few months later when the government stepped

113 “Price slashing” was a practice imported from the Soviet Union. On a given day and amidst great fanfare, prices for basic commodities would be cut. For the postwar Soviet context see Kirsty Ironside, “The Value of a Ruble: A Social History of Money in Postwar Soviet Russia, 1945–1964” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014), Chapter I. For the popular reactions to the price slashing in various regions of Romania see ANR, DGP, 24/1948.

114 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 147.

115 In 1948, for instance, Malaxa Works fired its employees in charge of firewood provisioning, including a group of cart owners employed for the transportation of wood to the employees' homes, all amidst protests; for the cart owners' petition see ANR, MM, 2493/1947, p. 2.

116 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 154.

in, abolished all debts and put an interdiction on the customary practice of taking up advances on the wage.¹¹⁷ Workers' debts, it was argued, obstructed the new wage system because "they messed up the workers' and the functionaries' plans, who could not organize their households, never knowing how much money they could count on."¹¹⁸ Consequently, debt was recast as yet another "legacy of the capitalist system" rather than of the postwar collective labor contracts.

Once cleared through governmental decree, the regime of debts would be replaced with a monetized social universe in which "each wage earner would make up her budget in accordance with her salary."¹¹⁹ To help workers budget their earnings, two mass savings campaigns were launched in early 1949. The first aimed at the creation of workplace based mutual savings associations or "houses" (*case de ajutor reciproc*) which would help the "government better apply the wage system" by "doing away with advances for good" and keeping salaries free of debts.¹²⁰ Here, again, UDR Reșița's mutualist fund offered a model for these new voluntary savings and loan associations: in principle, workers could make monthly deposits of up to 3% of their wage and, once a given threshold was reached, could expect to receive a loan for emergency cases not exceeding two monthly wages taken together.¹²¹ What was remarkable about this initiative was the fact that a form of mutualism was envisioned as a way of socializing the needs of the employees in the absence of state and factory resources. The second campaign involved deposits with the state's Savings and Consignments Bank known as C.E.C.: "the conscientious wage earner makes her own budget with great care and knows how much to spend on the moment and how much to save in order to later buy firewood, clothing, shoes, furniture and similar items".¹²² Such exhortations were

117 The first proposal to abolish debts dated from November 1948, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 53/1948.

118 "Un nou sprijin acordat muncitorilor și funcționarilor", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 61, July 14 1949; "Noi lămuriiri cu privire la anularea datoriilor muncitorilor și funcționarilor", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 107, September 7 1949.

119 "Aprovizionarea populației muncitoare cu lemne", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 38, June 17 1949.

120 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 67/1949, pp. 2–4. See also ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 81/1949, pp. 7–19 for the draft law and its justification.

121 "Casele de ajutor reciproc", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 68, August 16 1949. The case of UDR is discussed as a model in *Viața Capitalei*, No. 87, August 13 1949 and in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 81/1949, pp. 22–23.

122 "Depunerile la CEC, o contribuție la îmbunătățirea traiului salariaților", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 262, March 12 1950. For Reșița see "S-au deschis ghișeele C.E.C.", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 29, June 10 1949.

not merely presented as a way of rationalizing household budgeting but also as a means to finance postwar reconstruction, a superior goal for which each socialist citizen should have felt responsible. It is hard to say what results these two campaigns yielded. An initial estimate of C.E.C. deposits in Bucharest for 1949 showed only the better paid railroad workers manifested a clear interest in this opportunity.¹²³ Yet it is beyond doubt that such campaigns monetarized workers' everyday to a certain, perhaps limited, extent and softened the transition to the new wage system.

Implemented in 1949, the new wage system was a moving bundle of paradoxes: an experiment in inequality designed to revalue skill and reward stability that openly discriminated against the skilled and stable workers. Its early formulation dates from before the monetary stabilization, when top union bosses turned against the collective labor contracts that they themselves helped implement, in the name of hierarchy. In March 1947, it was already explained that the contracts had the perverse effect of de-monetarizing wages to such an extent that only between 20% and 40% of workers' earnings came in cash money (*numerar*), the rest being made up of various subsidies.¹²⁴ It went without saying that under-monetarized wages could not be subjected to any type of performance-based remuneration schemes such as the payment-by-result system (*muncă în acord*). Subsidized components of the wage apart, there were other details of the collective labor contracts that allegedly hindered the adequate correlation between performance and payment. Here is Vasile Luca explaining the gist of the matter in simple terms:

The new wage system does away with all the subsidies of the old one. In the old system workers worked the whole year for nothing and come Christmas, the capitalist tricked them with a small bonus, which they gave away according to their liking anyway. After August 23 1944, rather than doing away with this system we stood by it, we accepted children bonuses (*ajutor de copii*), things which simply replaced the wage; things which had nothing to do with performance. Labor productivity plummeted while wages went up. The wage itself was replaced with different commodities (*mărfuri*), which turned workers into profiteers [...] All of these bonuses, advances, loans, all of them kept workers glued to their factories because they had debts.¹²⁵

Luca concluded his speech by making it clear that factories were neither institutions of social insurance (*asigurare socială*) nor of social assistance (*asistență so-*

123 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 25. By contrast, of the 8601 employees of Malaxa Works only 202 made any deposits.

124 "Poziția CGM față de problema salariilor", *Viața Sindicală*, March 2 1947.

125 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 70/1948, p. 79.

cială) and by threatening all managers with jail time if they kept on giving loans to their workers. The new wage system tolerated none of this. It abolished the children bonus – a sort of family allowance paid to those workers with children – and the seniority bonus (*prima de vechime*) as well. The latter – a significant incentive for skilled workers to stay put with one employer for longer periods of time – was simply declared “dead wood weighing heavily on production costs and being in no way connected with higher productivity.”¹²⁶ Moreover, as party boss Gheorghiu-Dej explained in December 1948, this was a wage system crafted with the help of “Soviet advisors” and designed to assist the transition from a “politics of social assistance” to one of “economics”¹²⁷. It was also “the biggest enemy of laziness” that will contribute to the “disappearance of egalitarianism”.¹²⁸

Clearing the wage relation of bonuses and debts, of subsidized goods, of Easter or Christmas gratifications, Gheorghiu-Dej intimated, might raise questions of legitimacy: “we will have against us the backward worker, the enemies within the factories”.¹²⁹ But these were misplaced fears as the new wage system was implemented without much dissent on the part of either the skilled or the unskilled workers. The absence of any wave of protest over the dismantling of the “social wage” is perhaps not that surprising for the new wage system had its obvious benefits. Even when it discriminated against the more skilled workers by eliminating the seniority bonus, it also compensated them by lifting the skilled to the top of the wage scale.¹³⁰ Characteristically, an investigation conducted at Malaxa Works in November 1948 revealed that on paper the number of foremen seemed small but this was only because management decided to classify them as supervisory personnel in order to allow them to earn better than the skilled workers who already gained the highest wages.¹³¹ The situation was similar at UDR Reșița, though here management also noted the practice of pushing skilled workers up the wage scale entailed higher wages for the unskilled as well.

126 “Roadele noii salarizări”, *Viața Capitalei*, No. 31, June 9 1949.

127 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 69/1948, p. 6.

128 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 14/1948, p. 5.

129 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 69/1948, p. 6.

130 Due to lack of space I cannot delve more deeply into the question of the wage scale here. Suffices to say that between late 1947 and early 1950 Romania experimented with various Soviet inspired “mobile” wage scales for industrial workers. The wage scale that became hegemonic across heavy industry for the first half of the 1950s comprised 12 skill categories.

131 ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 8/1948, p. 2.

For the workers themselves, jumping from one wage category to another was very similar to the wartime “reevaluations” (*reîncadrări*) discussed in the first chapter. Unlike these earlier “reevaluations”, however, the ones undertaken throughout 1949 were remarkably indulgent. In Reșița, around 3,000 workers submitted official complaints in early 1949 asking to be pushed up on the wage scale, of which over 1,000 received a positive answer.¹³² In the following months another 2,000 complaints were again filed for the same reason, prompting one local party official to explain that engineers are under so much pressure from their workers that they preferred to push whole workteams up the wage ladder irrespective of their members’ skill levels.¹³³ Neither UDR Reșița nor Malaxa Works were exceptional cases. On the contrary, across Romanian industry the introduction of the new wage system caused an upsurge of nominal wages. No wonder that by early 1949 communist party bosses were discussing again the issue of “levelling” and the “hidden increases” of wages.¹³⁴

From the point of view of the monetarization of workers’ everyday life, the new wage system proved remarkably effective: debts were abolished, subsidized consumption was excised from the wage relation, payments in kind were forbidden and the mutualist savings associations attracted a good deal of workers’ savings in the following decade. The postwar social wage was remade in relative tranquility. Equally successful was the imposition of skill hierarchies in factories. In a speech delivered in October 1949, newly appointed Minister of Finance Vasile Luca congratulated his party colleagues for overcoming “the situation in which an unskilled worker with many children had a higher salary than a skilled one with fewer.”¹³⁵ All of these successes came at the price of rising nominal wages across industry and effected a shift of everyday forms of conflict from questions of provisioning to issues of workers’ control, norm determination, the payment of extra hours (*ore suplimentare*), shopfloor indiscipline and the climbing of the wage ladder.

I will explore these bones of contention at the factory level in greater detail in the last chapter. For the moment, I want to conclude by pointing out that the relocation of industrial conflict to the shopfloor was a consequence of the wage system implemented in 1949. It was the wage system itself that redirected the

132 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1949, p. 20.

133 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 70/1949, p. 60. The local trade-union in Reșița gave significantly higher figures. According to one report in May 1949 out of 4573 written complaints over 3300 were positively reviewed; ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 25/1949, p. 277 and 371.

134 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 31/1949, p. 10.

135 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 135/1949, p. 13.

workers away from the type of open protest around subsidized provisioning analyzed in the second chapter to the maddening and shadowy shopfloor struggles over work norms, productivity bonuses or piece-rate schemes, which I will survey in the final chapter of this book. This transformation was part and parcel of the unmaking of the “social wage” which marked a turning point in the history of postwar reconstruction: not only did it test the ability of the state’s infrastructural power to reach deep into the texture of the Romanian society, but it also occasioned the emergence of some of the bureaucratic structures that would come to regulate labor relations throughout the 1950s and even after. To put it differently, the nascent socialist state was cast in the mold of monetization, in the fields as well as in the factories, a manifold process that radically transformed wage systems, consumption arrangements and patterns of labor unrest.

Chapter IV

4 People's Capital (1948–1956)

4.1 The Plot of Property

“If a writer would carefully observe the life of our factories’ comrade Ion Marin tells us ‘I am sure a whole book could be published that would benefit the entire working-class of our country’”¹. Voiced through the voice of an employee of Malaxa Works, this call for committed research and writing was printed by the communist party’s daily *Scântea* in the summer of 1948, shortly after the state’s seizure of industrial property, an event the article dubbed “the revolutionary act of nationalization”. Indeed, comrade Marin was reporting from within the new epoch inaugurated by nationalization, and looked back at the recent past with contempt for a vanquished world that deserved no other reaction. This was a world of privilege, war and dictatorship, but also one of bitter struggle against the plant’s owner, against right-wing social-democrats (“wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing”) and likeminded saboteurs who

still...seek to compromise the leadership ability (*capacitatea de conducere*) of the best among the workers and the newly appointed managers, trying to show that only an exploiter, only somebody coming out of the bourgeoisie knows how to rule such an industrial establishment as our own.²

There was no shortage of writers willing to take up this theme, explore industrial life and write plays, short stories and novels, all with the desire to experiment with the genre of socialist realism. Yet few writers were able to accomplish the task with a reasonable degree of political consciousness and a keen eye for the details of the workers’ everyday social universe. Take, for instance, the case of Lucia Demetrius (1910–1992), the author of *Cumpăna* – arguably the most successful play about nationalization. A marginal, impoverished actress and occasional writer during the 1930s, Demetrius took up a job with Malaxa Works in 1937 where she was tasked with reading, summarizing and investigating the petitions various workers sent to the owner of the plant asking for money and help. Demetrius would often visit the working-class neighborhoods of Bucharest and briefed her boss on the living conditions of the many, underlining

¹ “Din lupta muncitorilor de la Uzina ‘23 August’ (fost Malaxa)”, *Scântea*, XVII, No. 1180, p. 4.

² IBIDEM.

the need for a local medical office and perhaps even a canteen. This experience might have helped sharpen the political sensibilities of the young actress, but it did not prepare her, ten years later, for the daunting undertaking of narrating “the revolutionary act of nationalization”. On the contrary, the first version of *Cumpăna* contained “a most serious political mistake”, as one censor reproached her, because a scene was found to depict a “Japanese strike”, an unthinkable event after nationalization.³ Demetrius grudgingly rewrote the scene in accordance with party doctrine, but went on to note:

We, writers, we went into the field (*pe teren*) with all our faith; we wanted to see the true changes, the true conflicts. It often happened for our plays to be read and criticized by office people, people who knew the doctrine, knew the intentions of the rulers, but were alien to reality.⁴

Going “into the field”, jotting down notes, talking to and even living among people of various social backgrounds were all characteristic features of the new socialist realist literature that emerged in postwar Romania to capture the unfolding of the socialist revolution. Some plays and novels aimed to depict how the coming of socialism transmogrified industrial life; others followed the trajectory of senior communist party activists, portraying their struggle against the forces of old and their contribution to the liberation of the country; yet others took on the revolution as it affected the countryside, detailing the advent of socialist agriculture, the collapse of traditional village structures and the building of collective farms. These were all topics easily amenable to narrative representation, whereby, in line with the requirements of the genre of socialist realism, heroes could be made to epitomize the fighting splendor of the new socialist universe in the making and pitted against the resilient backwardness of the old régime.

Nationalization, however, was a narrative puzzle for it was far from obvious how the alleged revolutionary nature of this event could be written into a plot. Demetrius’s mistake of inserting a “Japanese strike” into her play spoke volumes about the sheer difficulty of grasping what nationalization was supposed to mean and what exactly it was supposed to change at the level of the factory. How was nationalization “revolutionary” and what made it an “act” were questions that troubled the souls of these writers just as much as they lingered on the minds of workers, engineers, and perhaps man-

³ Lucia Demetrius, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2005), 348. Demetrius, unaware of the notion of a Japanese strike, recalls it as a “Portuguese strike”.

⁴ IBIDEM.

agers who witnessed the state's appropriation of private property firsthand on June 11, 1948.

This chapter asks, what was so inimical to the literary imagination about nationalization? What exactly happened on June 11, 1948 in the factories and what was the impact of the transition to state ownership of capital on labor relations? Firstly, I explore how June 11, 1948 became the day of the revolutionary act of nationalization and how this “revolutionary act” transformed ownership structures across Romanian industry and initiated a crisis of managerial authority, both in industries administered by Soviet-Romanian joint companies, the so-called Sovroms, and in the ones left to the Romanian state. I then move on to examine the manifold struggles of the new general managers to win, secure and reinforce their authority before the workers under conditions of state ownership. Managerial authority had been constantly tested and significantly weakened, not merely as a consequence of purges, strikes and revolts, but also due to the expansion of party and trade-union organizations at the factory level, where party and union bosses would often find themselves competing with, and hence challenging the decisions of the top managers, engineers and workshop supervisors. While a certain ambiguity around the issue of leadership within factories was encouraged by the communist party up until June 11, 1948, after it, murky lines of command and fractured, overlapping hierarchies were denounced for hindering the smooth run of production. The effort to reestablish managerial authority, however, produced a complex ritual of suspicion between party, trade-union and management, replete with mutual accusations of embezzlement and libelous campaigns.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I explore the tense relationship between investment policies and the social function of the industrial plant following nationalization. Should the “factories of the people” use their scarce resources to finance daycare facilities or should they instead invest in expanding their productive capacities? Was there a specific variety of socialist (or Soviet) paternalism available to guide the development of newly nationalized factories? These questions, I argue, are best answered by taking the nationalized factory as a gendered social space doubly circumscribed: first by the evolution of the collective labor contracts following June 11, 1948, and second by everyday struggles over issues of social reproduction.

4.2 The Making of an Event

The juridical transfer of ownership rights from shareholders and owners of capital to the state took place on Monday, June 11, 1948. This operation involved not

only the passing of a law by the Great National Assembly – the parliamentary body of the newly founded Popular Republic of Romania – but it also required direct state action and the mobilization of legions of party activists across the country. On that day it fell to the factory committees to gather the workers, stage a meeting after the lunch-break and break the news. The metalworkers of Laromet Works in Bucharest, for instance, were summoned at 2 p.m. and informed by one comrade Tegzeş – the secretary of the factory committee – about the “occupation of core industries”, a news which had just come through a radio announcement.⁵ Tegzeş immediately added, allegedly accompanied by waves of applause from the audience, that in these nationalized industries, the distinction between exploited and exploiters ceased to exist and that managers of working-class stock have replaced the old directors. Furthermore, he went on to draw attention to the fact that all employees must now be on the watch in order to safeguard the property of the people; that there must be tighter collaboration between manual workers and the technical staff and finally that the communist party is to be thanked for this unparalleled achievement.

The new general manager of the factory – a former worker by the name of Meşala – took the floor and asked the audience for support in his new mission as head of Laromet. Shortly thereafter another party activist told those present that the Soviet Union had decided to reduce by half the war reparations owed by Romania thereby opening the door for socialism. The gathering ended at five minutes past 3 o'clock in the afternoon with the collective singing of the Internationale. The last words of this report, however, cannot but catch the eye: “The meeting was all the time accompanied by applause and catchwords; the audience was enthusiastic over the unexpected event.”⁶ Jotted down in pencil on the notebook used to record the minutiae of the factory committee’s weekly meetings, this account reads like any other run-of-the-mill article on the unfolding and significance of June 11 published by the newspapers of the day. The emphasis on the emotional effervescence of the audience, the timing of the speeches and the details of the meeting, the reference to the end of exploitation, the thanks due to the Soviet Union and the party – these were all tropes associated with nationalization.

Take, for instance, the front-page article featured by the monthly magazine *Femeia* (The Woman) entitled “How I Received the Great News”. It contains mock interviews with women workers of Bucharest’s cotton spinning and textile industries and recounts the schedule of the day: the afternoon meeting, the speeches,

⁵ AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945–1949, p. 69.

⁶ IBIDEM, p. 70.

and the appointment of new managers: “Even today I tremble at the thought of it. I will never forget the moment when I entered the manager’s office, I put the seal on the money box and on all the documents and I checked his briefcase.”⁷ The near identical wording and encomiastic tone of these stories, appearing at the same time in the printed press and in handwritten factory archives, is no coincidence. Rather, this narrative pattern suggests their authors were probably writing in accordance with certain formulaic guidelines, part of which must have been to exaggerate workers’ enthusiasm, record the speeches made and underline the unforeseen nature of the event. Why, then, was nationalization an “unexpected event”?



Image 7: *Nationalization meeting in Reșița, June 11, 1948*; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 174/1948

It certainly could not have come out of the blue for Laromet’s workers themselves, at least not for those who participated in the general meeting of June 9, 1948. It was during that particular gathering that the 50% reduction offered by the Soviet Union was first advertised and comrade Tegzeş asked in return for more labor discipline on the shopfloor because “it won’t be long until, through our own work, we will advance toward socialism, ending the exploitation of man by man.”⁸ On the other side of the city, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might

7 “Cum am primit vestea cea mare”, *Femeia*, No. 5, July 1948.

8 AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945–1949, p. 69.

have been slightly surprised by the meeting of June 11, but they were certainly not shocked to discover the plant did no longer *de facto* belong to Nicolae Malaxa. Following an investigation conducted in early 1948, representatives of the Ministry of Industry allegedly discovered that the board of administration of the company spent much of the loan borrowed from the National Bank on investments not connected to production such as the maintenance of a farm just outside Bucharest that provisioned the canteen and the acquisition of shares in other companies. Since such actions violated the law, the Ministry of Industry was entitled to directly appoint its own general manager to overrule the board and supervise the owner. Consequently, in April 1948, Malaxa Works welcomed its new general manager, engineer Bobârnac, a man who would retain this position until the end of 1948, thus making irrelevant the appointment of another general manager on June 11.⁹ In Reșița, the rain must have made the meeting rather unpleasant, but it surely did not make much of an impression on the metalworkers worth mentioning in the main newspaper of the region *Luptătorul Bănățean*.¹⁰ The new general manager – a young man by the name of Carol Lonciar – was indeed a former worker of the steel mill, but he had already been serving as deputy manager since April 1948.¹¹

The “eventfulness” of nationalization must be evaluated against this background. Party and factory archives that closely document nationalization reveal an unquenchable tension between the epochal meaning attributed to it and the mundane, bland aspect the whole operation had to preserve; between the “revolutionary” nature of a day supposedly filled with popular enthusiasm and the widespread feeling that, with the exception of a hastily organized meeting, nothing spectacular had happened on that given Monday. This tension may be described as the interplay between two very different temporalities: the temporality of

⁹ Law no. 249, passed in July 1947, authorized the Ministry of Industry to perform checks on companies that took out loans from the National Bank and appoint a general manager (*administratori delegați*) where the law was not observed; for the details of the Malaxa case see ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 1/1947, pp. 6–9. Characteristically, the story was widely popularized as a corruption case throughout the summer of 1948, see, for example, “N. Malaxa și complicități săi au pompat fondurile necesare producției uzinelor trimițând sume mari peste granițe”, *Viața Sindicală*, June 26 1948.

¹⁰ June 11 1948 was a rainy day in Reșița according to the memory of Augustin Virag, a local communist party boss quoted by Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, *Höhepunkt ihrer Geschichte: eine Geschichte des Banater Berglands in der Zeitspanne 1920–1948* (Reschitz: Banatul Montan, 2006), 345.

¹¹ “Spor la muncă tovarășe Lonciar!”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1065, April 11 1948.

law-making and the corresponding temporality of social labor.¹² The first temporality, more amenable to historical narrative, showed state institutions and party organizations working together to create an element of surprise, planning weeks in advance under rules of secrecy so as to catch the factory owners off-guard and preempt any hostile reaction on their part. June 11, 1948 was thus conceived as a genuine bushwhack operation that would allow for peaceful dispossession, negligible disorder and the swift transfer of ownership rights from private persons (corporate and individual) to the state. The second temporality, one better suited to statistical representation, saw the same actors fretting over the need to reproduce the rhythms and routines of industrial production: hurrying workers back to their workbenches, enforcing the eight-hour workday, making sure wages were paid on time, facilitating transactions between companies, helping new managers get the hang of ruling over workers, accounting books and paychecks etc. It was the interaction of these two temporalities that combined to mark June 11, 1948 as an event.

The proceedings started early, possibly around 4 o'clock, with a meeting of the members of the nationalization commissions. This institution – created during the previous weeks and sharing its headquarters with the communist party – grouped party bosses, trade-union activists and state officials at the county level; all of them charged with supervising nationalization in their home cities and villages. Roughly after 9 a.m., nationalization brigades left for their assigned locations, careful not to enter factories before half past noon. Once inside, they grabbed and sealed cash registries, factory papers and the available correspondence. The meeting with the employees was convened between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, shortly after the Great National Assembly unanimously voted for the nationalization law. The full text of the law was broadcast in the evening, probably after 6 p.m. In many factories, reliable party members, police officers and gendarmes were asked to put in overtime, setting up night patrols to guard the factories and their surroundings; trusted party activists were instructed to visit working-class neighborhoods in order to explain to housewives what had just happened during the day. Few details were left to chance. A national census

¹² Social labor should be understood here in the Marxian sense as a form of abstract, objectivized domination that presents itself as “fate” to those whom it subjects; as Marx himself put it in *Grundrisse*: “Individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists, like a fate, outside of them; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals and is not managed by them as their common power and wealth.”, quoted and explained in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125. The implications of this understanding of social labor as the deep structure of modern social life will become clear below.

conducted in late 1947 by the country's leading statisticians provided the activists with a reliable roadmap for the location and profile of the factories, mills, and larger workshops that were to be nationalized.¹³

Unlike in large-scale factories where, as we have seen, the event might have come with an element of surprise, though not of utter shock, in smaller factories June 11 was indeed perceived as a revolutionary event, not least because the owners of almost every such business were triumphantly replaced by new managers. Reports sent from the provinces to the Central Committee in Bucharest describe a number of tragic scenes: in the western city of Timișoara, no less than 70 women workers employed by a small workshop started to cry when they saw their owner thrown out the factory gates – they were denounced for their “compromising attitude” (*atitudine împăciuitoare*); in the seaside city of Constanța, one woman refused to take over the head manager position out of lack of self-confidence and respect for the former owner – she was described as suffering from “mental issues”; in the town of Sibiu, the Romanian owner of a formerly German factory refused to be replaced claiming he was appointed directly by the Soviet Army in late 1944; in the oilfields that were north of Bucharest, party activists detected anti-Semitic sentiment on the part of some workers who found out their new manager was of Jewish origin. Meanwhile, in the city of Iași, a newly appointed factory manager found the job daunting, got depressed and ran away. Such cases were characteristic of the small scale, artisanal Romanian industry made up of family businesses hiring no more than a few dozens employees in both urban and rural environments. In many cases, since home and factory (or mill) were physically tied to each other, nationalization often spelled homelessness and dislocation, with owners being deprived of their residence as well as their capital.¹⁴ In these circumstances, it is perfectly plausible for women workers to have cried over their *patron* and for men to have gone berserk; for these workers and their employers, June 11, 1948 was emotional, violent and life changing, to wit revolutionary.

June 11, 1948 was surely, then, a revolutionary event for communist party bosses and perhaps even for the legions of activists that descended upon the factories that Monday. Yet while the activists were disappointed that workers do not quite understand basic slogans such as “factories belong to the people”, the

13 The results of the census were published as Mircea Biji, *Inventarierea întreprinderilor de stat, industriale, comerciale și de transport: rezultate provizorii* (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1948).

14 For the relationship between home and factory in the small scale, artisanal economy, see David Brody, “Time and Work during Early American Industrialism”, *Labor History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1989, 16–17.

party bosses worried some workers took the slogans to heart and misrepresented their message. Indeed, a cursory reading of the debates engaged within the Central Committee in the wake of nationalization reveals an ambiguous discourse about the event. Some workers, it was claimed, had come to entertain the “totally wrong opinion” that “nationalized factories became their personal goods”.¹⁵ Other workers got the equally wrong idea that “nationalization means the complete defeat of the enemies of the working class and the end of the exploitation of man by man. In fact, capitalist exploitation goes on both in nationalized factories and in the countryside where leftover boyars and kulaks exploit the labor power of the rural proletariat.”¹⁶ Moreover, some workers were seized by “reformist ideas” and began to write petitions in order to save their former managers and owners by keeping them employed in the same factories. Finally, perhaps the most misleading opinion of all was shared by workers arguing that “factory hierarchy should disappear. Some workers distort their friendship with the new managers picked from the working-class, mock the engineers and the supervisory personnel while speaking about an unjust form of egalitarianism.”¹⁷ For party bosses, nationalization ought to have been about something else:

Nationalized factories become more and more profitable (*rentabile*) due to the enthusiastic work of the workers, due to their love for the factory which manifests itself in the care with which tools are being handled in order to increase production and productivity. Funds resulting from increased profitability are accumulated within the factory and taken over by the state, which uses them to build new factories, develop social assistance, culture houses, and for boosting the material and cultural wellbeing of the working people.¹⁸

This language of profit, accumulation and redistribution spoke not merely of the fear that some unnamed workers might have gone too far in their interpretation of nationalization; it equally spoke of the need to reproduce, and even enhance the reproduction of the practices that constitute social labor. Whereas the temporality of law-making promised the revolutionary break with forms of ownership associated with capitalism, the temporality of social labor made clear the continuity (hence implicit neutrality) of a set of practices proper to both capitalism and socialism: the structure of the workday, the rhythms of the shop floor, the

¹⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 92/1948, p. 17.

¹⁶ IBIDEM.

¹⁷ IBIDEM, p. 12.

¹⁸ IBIDEM, p. 15.

wage relation, factory hierarchy and the flows of industrial production.¹⁹ The interplay of the two temporalities, therefore, was bound to create some confusion with the workers and even with party bosses monitoring the event from Bucharest. Thus, for instance, in an early draft of instructions for activists on how June 11 should unfold, it was envisaged that workers must necessarily make up for the lost time between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon – the full hour during which they were summoned to the meeting that announced nationalization.²⁰ Neither the workday, nor the payment of wages could be altered by June 11. On the contrary: as nationalization took place four days before the first wage installment (*chenzină*), the new managers were instructed to do everything in their power to pay the wages on time. For those factories lacking money to cover salaries, managers had to immediately notify the National Bank, which would duly provide the required amount of cash. Moreover, on June 15, the Ministry of Industry sent out an alarmed telegram to all nationalized factories noting how the rate of commercial transactions plummeted and the nexus between firms, markets and clients was likely to break apart causing the money flow to freeze. It urged managers to restart production, take care of their orders and observe the rules of offer and demand.

In the aftermath of June 11, the two temporalities intertwined to create a vantage point for assessing the transformative consequences of the new state ownership on workers' consciousness. Indeed, according to the communist party's daily *Scântea*, the event of nationalization could not have but energized workers' everyday: absenteeism, foot dragging, disobeying factory hierarchy were all deemed bad habits inherited from the capitalist past to be overcome. One article specific to Laromet Works went on to note that although the situation of wasted productive hours got significantly better after June 11, there were still many workers who "did not learn to cherish every minute and love each moment in production."²¹ In the following weeks, the proper use of the workday (*între-*

¹⁹ The notion of "structure" should be understood here in opposition to that of "event" along the following lines: "While events are caused or suffered by specific subjects, structures as such are supra-individual and intersubjective. They cannot be reduced to individual persons and seldom to exactly determinable groups. Methodologically, therefore, they demand functional determinants. Structures do not in this way become entities outside of time, but rather gain a processual character, which can then enter into everyday experience.", Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. It is in this sense that social labor can be said to be a "structure": at the same time the object and the ground of domination in modern societies.

²⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 57/1948, p. 11. The paragraph was crossed out in red pencil marks.

²¹ "Să combatem cu hotărâre indisciplina în muncă", *Scântea*, No. 1155, June 27 1948.

buințarea riguroasă a zilei de muncă) became something of an obsession for the new manager, comrade Mașala.²² There was a crackdown against the customary ten minutes of tardiness that was usually tolerated, with employees made aware that any punching card not validated at 7 a.m. sharp would duly bring a fine to its owner.²³ Moreover, nobody was any longer allowed to linger on the factory premises after the official end of the workday was signaled by siren, less out of fear of sabotage and more as a way of enforcing a certain degree of control over the use of extra-hours. Small wonder then that already by June 24, during a general meeting of the employees, one party activist gleefully explained nationalization was in his view the last step in the long struggle undertaken by the communist party to “normalize the 8-hour workday”.²⁴

Mașala's enforcement of a stricter workday was preceded by the enforcement of Mașala as a stricter general manager of Laromet. On June 17, 1948, during the first meeting of the technical personnel of the factory after nationalization, the body of engineers gathered to salute the “new leader”, a former employee of the national railway company (CFR) for over 20 years, and somebody “who knows what we need, knows our worries”²⁵. Both Mașala and the engineers admitted his task was not easy as the factory was running high debts and had no money for investments. Yet they also agreed that June 11 ought to make workers more diligent, ready to care for their tools, more concerned with higher output, less prone to wasting time and materials, now that factories belonged to them. These words were not in vain. By the end of 1948, comrade Mașala could show an outstanding increase in the production of core nonferrous semifabrics: brass, zinc, aluminum, and copper. With the same industrial machines, a small bank loan and the same number of employees, Laromet managed to almost double its output between June 11 and December 31 due to the “class consciousness of the employees and the political education instilled by the party.”²⁶ Financially, the factory cut back on its debt, registered a modicum of profit (*beneficiu*) and even allowed itself to pay for the maintenance of a daycare and build a hall for indoor sports and meetings. This success story, certainly exaggerated

²² Labor inspectors shared the same obsession with the proper use of the workday. One such labor inspector, for instance, visiting Laromet Works in November 1948 recommended among others for comrade Meșala to set up privies in each and every workshop. In this way workers would be prevented to leave their posts and run around in search of toilets thus wasting time. ANR, MM, 2545/1947, p. 1–6.

²³ AMB, Fond Laromet, 15/1945, p. 138 and 150.

²⁴ AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945–1949, p. 74.

²⁵ AMB, Fond Laromet, 14/1947, p. 38.

²⁶ AMB, Fond Laromet, 5/1948, p. 3.

and perhaps even doctored, reveals how the event of nationalization was “normalized” in the course of the second half of 1948.

The fear that workers and the new managers could read too much into the “revolutionary act” of nationalization was real. That it was a misplaced fear, more a figment of the party bosses’ imagination than a fact of industrial life, changes nothing: the newspapers were full of warnings of the following kind: “Some believe that now after we have removed the owner, profit will be split among the workers. This is a mistaken way of ‘understanding’ nationalization. Now profits will be used first and foremost for investments.”²⁷ Or, further down the page in the same issue of *Scântea*: “In some places, workers of the nationalized factories tend to waste the capital and income of their factories on various things which are indeed important, but which are not necessary at the moment: some want to begin the ‘reconstruction’ of an open air swimming pool, others want a chalet in the mountains, yet others crave for a modern sport hall etc. Some of the new managers even move in this direction – either because they want to win over workers and enjoy cheap popularity or because they don’t treat the problem with the seriousness it deserves.”²⁸ It is hard to say whether such hopes and desires were actually held by workers and their new managers or whether they were simply publicized by the printed press in anticipation of what might happen if the nationalization process was misunderstood. It is therefore more reasonable to argue that such discourses of anxiety over the various meanings of June 11 were not overt reactions to popular demand but rather the product of an effort to dissolve the rupture occasioned by nationalization, including the revolutionary horizon of expectation allegedly opened up on that day, into the normal flow of industrial production. This is precisely why the day was never intended as a popular fête nor would it ever be celebrated on par with November 7, May 1 or August 23 – all dates of central importance for the socialist calendar and popular culture. June 11 would rarely be associated with street names, or those of stadiums, parades or holidays.

For communist party bosses, the temporality of social labor with its time sheets, punching cards, paychecks, output figures, list of prices, guidelines for capital investment, bank loans, factory debt, and profit margins was the only testing ground for judging the nature of June 11 as a major revolutionary event. For William Sewell Jr., the practicing historian should be able to distinguish between genuine events and mere ruptures in the texture of social forma-

²⁷ “Fabricile sunt ale poporului muncitor. Să le gospodărim chibzuit”, *Scântea*, No. 1149, June 19 1948.

²⁸ IBIDEM.

tions: the first “significantly transform structures”, the latter, while momentarily explosive for social order “are neutralized and reabsorbed into the pre-existing structures in one way or another.”²⁹ Chains of ruptures, according to Sewell, might indeed give birth to events to the extent they resist neutralization, and as a consequence end up revolutionizing social relations and practices.³⁰ Was nationalization, then, an event in Sewell’s sense, or was it instead a rupture stitched back on to the fabric of social practices that constituted social labor in mid-twentieth century East Central Europe? Or to put it more bluntly: is the success of Laromet Works during the second half of 1948, no matter how suspicious, evidence of a revolution in social structure initiated by June 11, or is it rather the expression of an accelerated reproduction of social practice brought about by nationalization?

Stated in this way the question is meaningless since it can be answered both ways.³¹ Writing from his Parisian exile, social-democrat Șerban Voinea was led to believe that June 11 did indeed launch a revolution in social structure, albeit one pursued through dictatorial means that deeply compromised the meaning of nationalization before the Romanian working-class.³² Experiencing the aftermath of June 11 on the shopfloor, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might be forgiven for navel-gazing before the sermons about nationalization delivered by party activists; workers looked forward to signing new collective labor contracts at the end of the year, argued over piece-rate norms, demanded proper working clothes and complained about the lack of consumer items at the local cooperative.³³ For

29 William H. Sewell Jr. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

30 IBIDEM, 226. Note that for Sewell social relations and practices are “profoundly governed by underlining social and cultural structures.” It is this insistence on the constraining effects of “structure(s)” that makes Sewell’s complex understanding of the role of contingency in social transformation (i.e. events) stand out from the crowd of more traditional approaches to the topic that privilege a voluntarist and conspiratorial, nay intuitive grasp of social life; see Pierre Nora, “Le retour de l’événement”, in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.) *Faire de l’histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011 [1974]), 283–307.

31 The question ceases to be meaningless on a more charitable understanding of events, such as the one proposed by Koselleck: “A trial involving labor law, for instance, can be both a dramatic history in the sense of ‘event’ and simultaneously an index of a long-term social, economic, and legal elements.”, Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. My interpretation of nationalization is heavily influenced by Koselleck’s great essay “Representation, Event, and Structure”.

32 Șerban Voinea, *La socialization* (Paris: P.U.F., 1950), 176–180.

33 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 17/1948, pp. 62–69.

them, as for many other workers and their families, the more shocking news must have been the governmental decision issued in November 1948 according to which the customary Christmas bonus was abolished on the grounds it represented “a technique of the bourgeoisie to deceive wage earners”.³⁴ In Reșița, metalworkers might have also succumbed to self-absorption, but they were also made to contemplate the production diagram – drawings on small blackboards, sometimes in colored chalk that allegedly helped workers of the bridge construction section of the plant achieve the highest productivity ever.³⁵ For them and their peers across UDR’s sections, the introduction of the production diagram signaled a period of labor intensification, as did the constant pressure of the new managerial team brought about by June 11 to cut down piece-rate norms and make workers push harder for achieving their base salary.

June 11, 1948 was both an event, albeit one less revolutionary than *Scântea* claimed and more traumatic than the briefings describing the experience of the dispossessed owners suggested. It was also an index of the heightened reproduction of practices embedded in the structure of social labor. Grasped from within the temporality of law-making, the transfer of ownership rights to the state is the stuff of dramatic history and can be rendered in narrative form, much like the socialist realist writers did in their plays and novels dedicated to the event. This temporality, however, could not frame the meaning of nationalization, above vignettes about the downfall of the propertied bourgeoisie and beyond plots about lurking class enemies committing sabotage, both of which constituted the political *faits divers* that filled newspaper pages. The full meaning of nationalization had to be inferred from within the temporality of social labor, a maneuver that required statistical description rather than plain narrative. The epochal significance of June 11, 1948 as a foundational moment in the history of state socialism in Romania was to be confirmed by the type of output report assembled by Laromet’s manager or by the chalked charts figured on the shop floors of UDR Reșița. It was these kinds of documents, alongside paychecks, punching cards and production plans that verified both the reproduction of social labor and the transformative consequences that nationalization had on the social structure of Romanian society. There was no contradiction between the two as long as socialism was synonymous with the emergence and development

34 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 18/1948, p. 59.

35 “Muncitorii și tehnicienii de la Fabrica de poduri au atins cea mai mare productivitate a muncii avută până în prezent”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1245, November 14 1948 and “Să fie îmbunătățite diagramele de producție la oțelărie și furnale înalte”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1235, November 3 1948.

of the large-scale company because “it is not hard to understand that a large and profitable state factory has more opportunities to better the ‘social wage’ and to contribute to the bettering of its employees’ standard of living.”³⁶

That socialism was about large, state owned factories making a profit for the sake of redistribution was not intuitive; that this process would entail an intensified pace of work, tighter piece-rate norms, a stricter factory hierarchy, and a deferral of investments in social welfare all for the purpose of capital accumulation was rather hard to understand. Foremen, for instance, might have found it hard to comprehend why all of a sudden some of them were accused of being secretive about their job, not sharing crucial details about the functioning of machines and the use of tools. In Reșița, one party activist noted with some concern that “there is a kind of tradition that foremen don’t give away their secrets. This is why when one of them falls ill somebody has to visit him at home and ask him how to work in order for production not to come to a still on that day.”³⁷ The intensification of work could not be hindered by such anachronistic habits of the craft. Party activists and union delegates must have been surprised that after June 11, 1948 they were forbidden to hold meetings during working hours or storm into the office of the general manager with all kinds of petty requests. Both the production plan and the authority of the manager could have been sapped by such recently acquired routines. Finally, workers must have been puzzled to find out the new collective labor contracts signed in early 1949 continued the obligation of factories to invest in livestock, farms and vegetable gardens only to condition these investments on overall profit. After June 11, 1948, socialism equaled sacrifice.

4.3 The Crisis of Managerial Authority

Engineer Bobârnac’s career as head manager of Malaxa Works was cut short several months after nationalization. Praised in the party press for his outstanding abilities as leader of Bucharest’s largest metal plant, Bobârnac swiftly and rather unexpectedly came under the combined attack of trade-union and party bosses at the factory level. By late June 1948, he came to be accused of seldom being present in his office, of widespread unpopularity and of displaying a kind of “forced respect” (*respect forțat*). This was harsh, though understandable criti-

³⁶ “Regruparea întreprinderilor industriale”, *Scântea*, No. 1189, August 15 1948.

³⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 9. The most entertaining literary rendering of this attack on metalworkers’ craft tradition by the young and unskilled is Mihail Davidoglu’s *Cetatea de foc*, a socialist realist play set in Reșița in 1949.

cism as Bobârnac must have been extremely stressed, with limited time at his disposal for weaving ties of respect with his peers and getting to know the plant's party and trade-union consecrated leaders. Yet he was guilty of something much more serious: "he showed mistrust toward his subordinates, hindering them from taking any kind of decision without his consent".³⁸ Moreover, he appointed a number of "old men", known to have been close associates of the of the former owner; engineers and office clerks who, paradoxically, seemed intent to work "as if for the state", without any commitment whatsoever. Bobârnac pleaded his cause, arguing that he was a busy man, admitting that he did not trust his subordinates and by pointing out that union and party bosses at the factory level were plotting to discredit him. Ministerial authorities took the side of the manager and dismissed the allegations, showing that Bobârnac was "able and hardworking, committed from seven in the morning to half past ten at night to solving problems small and large."³⁹ Solving problems "small and large" singlehandedly was the very stake of this scandal, as would become clear a couple of week later when Bobârnac was again accused of having "monopolized all the work for himself".⁴⁰ It was this last round of criticism that forced Bobârnac to resign. In advancing their different interpretations of what factory hierarchy should look like after June 11, 1948, neither union and party leaders at the factory level nor the head manager of Malaxa Works were acting against the general principle of managerial authority laid out by the communist party in the wake of nationalization.

This principle, colloquially referred to as *troica*, prescribed that authority in the newly nationalized factories is shared among the trade-union, the party organization and the head manager, with the first two obliged to help the latter in administering the factory. This meant that the general director could not rule alone, but rather had to consult union and party delegates on a whole array of matters pertaining to everyday politics such as provisioning, promotions, hiring and lay-offs. The *troica* principle notably made sense in small and medium-sized factories where the newly appointed managers were selected from among the more faithful and trustworthy workers, and could thus be legitimately suspected of lacking experience in running an industrial establishment. This was how a widely circulated pedagogical brochure articulated the relationship between the manager, the party organization and the union delegates:

38 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 19/1948, p. 113.

39 IBIDEM, p. 115.

40 IBIDEM.

It is the duty of each and every party member and worker to help the managers so that they can accomplish their tasks. Let us note that most of them lack the experience to lead (*experiența de a conduce*), to administer the factory: let us then help them to acquire the necessary experience and ability as quick as possible, and use it in the service of the working people. They should enjoy the complete respect of the workers, engineers and functionaries. We should be aware that friendship relations between former working mates and the new manager-worker (*directorul-muncitor*) might harm work discipline and the smooth running of industrial production.⁴¹

This type of discourse addressed to party and union bosses was complemented by myriad speeches meant to instruct the new managers on how to get a grip of their status as leaders of industry. Such was the case, for instance, with a lecture delivered by Minister of Industry and party notable Chivu Stoica before an audience composed of Bucharest's newly appointed managers. Stoica attempted to explain the duties of management now that "capital belongs to the people"⁴², particularly in view of the concerns expressed by some of the new managers themselves in the weeks following June 11, 1948. Firstly, Stoica pointed out that the expertise of former owners in matters of financial, administrative and technical organization was highly valuable and managers should be able to "steal their secrets". Moreover, even though nationalization abolished the institution of the Board of Administrators, it often happened that highly skilled engineers were part of these boards. They too should be milked for their knowledge, and retained within factories under the close supervision of the party because "the capital of their expertise does not belong to them."⁴³ Secondly, any change in the wage scale was strictly forbidden, even in those cases in which technical personnel were judged to be earning too much. Characteristically, in early July 1948 the Central Committee approved a ministerial recommendation according to which, after nationalization, the new managers, as long as they were appointed from among the working-class, would necessarily receive a lower salary than the chief engineer of the factory.⁴⁴ The wage scale rewarded skill over function. Finally, Stoica ended the lecture by urging the new managers to become "more severe than a capitalist manager." Stoica gave the example of Vulcan Works, a medium-sized metal factory in the capital city, where workers had

⁴¹ *Despre naționalizarea întreprinderilor industrial, bancare, de asigurări, miniere și de transporturi* (Bucharest: Editura PMR, 1948), 39.

⁴² ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 57/1948, p. 4.

⁴³ *IBIDEM*, p. 3. The argument Stoica was making here run as follows: since these engineers were trained in public schools financed by the taxpayers' money either in Romania or abroad, their acquired knowledge was eminently public in nature.

⁴⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 17/1948, p. 5.

recently built a canteen with the owner's money and were now requesting all sorts of investments in similar amenities: "[T]his is neither possible nor right. The surplus must be directed to the state's treasury. [...] There might indeed be pressure to build swimming pools or sports fields. We should not give in."⁴⁵ Giving in to popular demands for investments in such amenities, Stoica concluded, would bring about the "death of our regime."⁴⁶

Bobârnac hardly conformed to the new category of "manager-worker": he could neither be suspected of lacking managerial experience nor could he be denounced for retaining friendships with his former workmates. As we have seen, the opposite was the case, as Bobârnac allegedly turned out to have a distant personality, bent on taking his job seriously and in doing so, was willing to risk antagonizing Malaxa Works' party and union bosses. His downfall came as a consequence of a struggle over the nature of managerial authority within the factory in the wake of nationalization. This struggle, which pitted managers against party and union bosses, was common in both small and medium-sized factories headed by "manager-workers" such as Laromet, as well as in large-scale plants under the leadership of engineers, as was the case with Malaxa Works. By late September 1948, an upsurge in conflicts around managerial authority caused the Central Committee to declare the *troica* principle a failure. Noting that in many nationalized factories, it was either the manager controlling party and union bosses, or union delegates and party representatives controlling the manager, Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej concluded the *troica* diffused authority, causing strife where industrial order and responsibility should have reigned. Consequently, nobody could be made accountable for failing production plans as long as the manager's prerogative to give orders continued to be challenged and undermined.⁴⁷

What replaced the *troica* would come to be known as the "sole leadership" (*conducere unică*) principle. The "sole leadership" principle – i.e. the idea that the manager was the only source of command within the factory, endowed with power to overrule both the ruling body of the factory committee and the ubiquitous party organizations planted in each and every section of the plant – had a venerable Stalinist pedigree. Indeed, it was in the Soviet Union of the late 1920s that the principle was first formulated as an answer to a question which might have seemed familiar to Bobârnac himself: "Is it possible to exercise com-

⁴⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 57/1948, p. 8.

⁴⁶ IBIDEM.

⁴⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 35/1948, pp. 5–6.

mand against the party if its politics hinders industrial efficiency?”⁴⁸ The general manager of Malaxa Works – engineer Bobârnac – seemed to have answered this question in the positive, as did the new “manager-worker” of UDR, thirty-one-year-old former welder Carol Loncear. Following June 11, 1948, Loncear proceeded to tone down the acquired habits of the party and union bosses in the plant by setting office hours and by declaring he cannot be disturbed, not even by CGM representatives traveling from Bucharest, unless an appointment was made in advance. Predictably, this administrative move was met with slander by local party and union leaders. While the setting up of office hours in and of itself was not found to violate the *troica* principle, Loncear’s attempt to seal himself off from the everyday politics of the plant was found utterly offensive, a token of the entrenched industrial tradition of the place (“*spiritul Reșiței*”).⁴⁹ Reproaches poured: “He works a lot, and he looks to rise up to the occasion, but more often than not he is anarchic in his work methods and rather superficial. Even when he aims to explain a problem he does not manage to nail down the subject; in the past he had many faults, being a drunkard, and a bit of a fly-away (*ușuratic*), though he has recently matured. He tackles many problems too quickly, he often agrees with us but then he lets himself be influenced by the technical personnel and does the opposite. He displays some unjust attitudes of defiance.”⁵⁰ Born in 1917, he was further accused of being too young to wield any authority over workers, and too inexperienced to head the country’s leading industrial plant.⁵¹

None of these accusations stuck. Unlike engineer Bobârnac, the young welder from Reșița retained and consolidated his position for a number of years, only to then make a career as Deputy Minister and Minister of Heavy Industry throughout the 1950s. Part of the reason why Loncear could not be easily replaced might be attributed to the timing of the struggle, which unfolded at the moment when the Central Committee agreed to introduce the “sole leadership” principle. Matters of chance aside, the fact that Loncear was a native poster child of the steel mill must have also contributed a great deal to furthering local expectations. That he was also something of a communist hero, having spent time in jail during the war following the arrest and death of his own brother –

⁴⁸ This is how historian Yves Cohen sums up in question form the manifold debates around managerial authority that took place in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s; Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890–1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 640.

⁴⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 13.

⁵⁰ IBIDEM, p. 8.

⁵¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 33/1948, pp. 5–6.

a communist militant – must have counted for something in the eyes of party bosses in Bucharest.⁵² That Loncear surrounded himself with an aura of modesty, refusing to take residence in the villa of the former general manager in order to transform it into a daycare, might have suggested the new director continued to be a man of the people.⁵³ Even those who got to know Loncear personally during the early 1950s recall his down-to-earth approach to factory life. Take, for instance, the following description provided by Dorin Pavel, the engineer in charge of building a dam and a hydro-electrical power plant to run the steel mill in Reșița:

From the outset, and as long as Loncear was general manager, we were left to work independently. We did not need to request official approvals for our solutions or projects. When we encountered difficulties, it was enough to give a call to comrade Loncear and everything was put in order. The following event is telling for this able former welder. We arrive in Reșița in the morning to visit the locomotive workshop where they would weld the 700 mm Semenik pipes, designed to resist the extraordinary pressure of 75 atmospheres. They had already tested the first pipes and noted that under the water pressure, many had leaked. They welded them only on the outside. I immediately asked comrade Loncear to come and see. ‘Well, well, my brothers, my welders, have you no shame ... you say you cannot go inside the 700 mm pipes to weld, bring me a ventilator’. As tall as he was, though lean, he welded the whole ten meters on the inside. Put to the test the pipe was waterproofed. ‘See now, does it work or not? Weld me the entire stack of pipes and I’ll give you 40000 lei as bonus.’ There were seven welders and they all got the promised money that day.⁵⁴

No doubt, Loncear’s ability to secure a degree of independence for the engineers supervising the construction site, as well as his capacity to put things in order with a phone call presupposed a certain political savviness in coordinating the distribution of resources and containing the occasional inquiries of zealous party activists. It is no surprise, then, that it is precisely this skillset of the general manager that made it into the pages of a socialist realist novel devoted to the

52 These biographical details are provided by long time social-democrat trade-union boss Eftimie Gherman in an article written in exile, see *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 35. Gherman mocks Loncear, whom he might have known personally, because he became a communist not by conviction but by chance, due to the family tragedy he endured during the war. The tone of the portrait, however, remains respectful: “Of all the communists in Reșița, Loncear is the only one who knows what he wants.”

53 “La Uzinele Reșița s-a înfăptuit o frumoasă creșă pentru copii”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1176, August 25 1948.

54 *Caietele de amintiri ale profesorului Dorin Pavel. A patra conferință a hidroenergeticienilor din România*, 26–27 mai 2006, București (unpaged manuscript).

erection of the dam, Nicolae Jianu's award winning *Cumpăna luminilor* (1952). For Jianu – who had spent several weeks incognito among construction workers around Reșița – comrade Chirtoș, the character modeled after Loncear, was capable of subtle maneuvering among rival engineers, competing foremen, and dispassionate office clerks, always aiming to conduct the conduct of his subordinates. And it was this pastoral power that allegedly impressed workers and engineers alike because, as another character of the novel says about the general manager “snappish at times, his words sting, but he's always helpful when needed and good at it too.”⁵⁵

Yet no matter how many more such examples we might retrieve in support of Loncear's power position vis-à-vis local party and trade-union bosses, none of them will fully explain why the young welder was able to shake off party criticism. This explanation should be sought, not merely in the symbolic practices that construed Loncear's managerial authority, but also in the ownership structure that was imposed on the steel mill following June 11, 1948. In this respect, the difference between Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița could not be greater. While both companies were integrated into the German war economy via the Nazi conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring (H.G.W.) in early 1941, the manner in which this inclusion took place was different. For the case of Malaxa Works in Bucharest, the Romanian state acquired 50% of the shares in January 1941 and the other half during the following month thus effectively nationalizing the plant before renting it out to a German joint-stock company (ROGIFER) later that same year.

According to historian Florian Banu, this type of wartime nationalization was undertaken out of Ion Antonescu's fear that the loss of control over economic life at the hands of the Germans would bring about the loss of control over domestic politics.⁵⁶ This allegedly “protectionist” reaction to the expansion of German capital could not be replicated in the case of UDR where H.G.W. inherited a large number of shares from a Czechoslovak shareholder swallowed by Germany in 1938. With the collapse of the war economy, Malaxa Works underwent privatization and was returned *in toto* to its original majority shareholder, Nicolae Malaxa. Declared “enemy assesses” by the Armistice Convention of September 1944, UDR's H.G.W. shares were taken over by the Soviets as war reparations. It was these “enemy” shares, amounting to over 30% by November 1947, that constituted the Soviet contribution to the joint-stock company – Sovromme-

⁵⁵ Nicolae Jianu, *Cumpăna luminilor* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului a C.C. al U.T.M., 1952), 466.

⁵⁶ Florian Banu, *Asalt asupra economiei României, de la Solagra la Sovrom (1936–1956)*, (Bucharest: Nemira, 2004), 54.

tal Reșița – that emerged after nationalization to manage the steel mill, the metal factories and the mines that had belonged to UDR.⁵⁷ In contrast, Malaxa Works was simply re-nationalized in 1948 and placed under the control of the Romanian state.

Sovrommetal Reșița was a latecomer to the string of Soviet-Romanian joint-stock companies (Sovroms) that came into existence after the end of the war in naval and maritime transport, petroleum, wood processing, banking, manufacturing, mining, movie and other industries as well.⁵⁸ Yet in spite of their importance for the postwar economy, both domestic and international, little is known about how these joint-stock companies operated. From the standpoint of ownership, these were bi-national corporations governed by the laws of profit. One agreement between the two countries signed in 1949 specified that dividends were exempt from taxes, with the two shareholders splitting 80% of the annual profits, the remaining 20% being retained by management for investments and similar spending within the company.⁵⁹ It is reasonable to suppose that apart from facilitating an outflow of cheap goods, notably raw materials such as oil and timber, these companies also contributed to a transfer of industrial technology from the Soviet Union to Romania. The evidence to support this, however, is scarce. For instance, Soviet experts did build an assembly line for the caterpillar KD-35 tractor in the city of Brașov and did provide expertise for the enlargement of the steel mill in Reșița. More important for the argument developed in this chapter was the way in which managerial authority was upheld within the Sovroms.

Unlike the companies owned completely by the Romanian state such as Malaxa Works or Laromet in Bucharest, the joint-stock Soviet-Romanian companies were infinitely more eager to enforce factory hierarchy. Take, for example, the case of the Soviet specialist supervising the production of tractors in the city of Brașov. By July 1949, comrade Supikașvili was driven crazy by the manner in which the general manager – one comrade Trandafirescu – understood his role as “sole leader” of the plant: “He does not have the ability to comprehend the major problems of the factory, and even though he works very much, he always gets lost in details.”⁶⁰ According to Supikașvili, comrade Trandafirescu was unable to lower production costs because he lacked authority: he refused

57 ANR, UDR, 1039/1947, p. 5 *et passim* for the full list of UDR's shareholders.

58 Still the most reliable guide to the spread of Soviet joint-stock companies across Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia is Nicolas Spulber, *The Economics of Communist Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, M.A., MIT Press, 1957), 166–223.

59 ANR, PCM, Comisia de Colaborare Tehnico-Științifică, 7/1949, pp. 1–6.

60 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarerie, 169/1949, p. 66.

to fire at least 40 office clerks from the allegedly overstuffed accounting unit of the plant; he was always granting audiences during the workday arguing that were he to stop doing so workers would call him a dictator; and finally Trandafirescu could not grasp the proper relationship between the general manager and the party and union bosses. Not only was he always asking for their input in matters of administration, but he also turned a blind eye to the fact that these activists were forcing many good technicians to quit their jobs. Supikaşvili, therefore, demanded a new general manager.

The young Loncear, we now begin to understand, no matter how much authority he was personally commanding, diligently observed the requirements needed to run a joint-stock Soviet-Romanian company. The Soviet advisor in Reşiţa, comrade engineer Simonenco, acting as a deputy general manager of the steel mill was an adamant supporter of the “sole leadership” principle. During a national conference that assembled the country's leading experts of the metal industries in October 1949, Simonenco expressed his disappointment that more than one year after nationalization, many directors were still sharing their authority with party and union bosses at the factory level: “The sole leadership is of utmost importance. From the general manager down to the team leaders and workshop supervisors, all of them should feel responsible for the duties entrusted to them by the state. This cannot be done unless every leader (*conducător*) knows his obligations perfectly. Decisions over production depend on it.”⁶¹

Naturally, it was much easier for lower management – workshop supervisors, team leaders, engineers, foremen and others – to secure their authority before workers and party organizations within a joint-stock company. Working under the Soviets allowed them to justify their commands by simply invoking the will of the Soviet advisors rather than of native managers. Thus, for instance, engineers of the Jiu Valley mining company Sovromcărbune were able to dismiss or ignore workers' demands (*revendicări*) by arguing they were instructed by the Soviets to do so. Moreover, using the same justification made it possible for them to apply fines and distribute punishments down the chain of command without fearing reprisals from the party or union organizations.

It is understandable that anti-Soviet sentiment was soon detected among the miners, who complained of having their requests silenced. The appeal of anti-Soviet sentiment, however, should not be exaggerated. For instance, Simonenco was held in high regard for his willingness to undertake reevaluations without

61 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cămară, 91/1949, p. 101.

the consent of the trade-union in order to reward newly qualified workers.⁶² Be that as it may, by the end of 1948 it had become increasingly clear that even within the Sovrom companies, trade-union activists were pushing for workers' demands by way of fighting against the new general managers: "Many bosses of the factory committees show the tendency to substitute themselves for the general manager. Even when they don't do so completely, they still force the new managers to adopt a passive attitude which is very bad for the production process and for the collaboration between workers and engineers."⁶³ These so-called "anarchists", one report alarmingly noted, "still did not understand that their role in defending the real interests of the salaried cannot take the form of making all sorts of demands on management, often inspired by reactionaries. The leadership of the Sovrom companies is not a capitalist leadership."⁶⁴

The new leadership that followed comrade Bobârnac at Malaxa Works might have not been capitalist. Yet between late 1948 and early 1953, the plant changed four general managers, all of whom were deeply concerned with containing challenges to factory hierarchy coming from party and union bosses. Unlike in the case of Reșița where party, union and management found common ground immediately after the end of the war in 1945, Malaxa Works remained a factory divided between strong party and union organizations, with a managerial team controlled up until late 1947 by the plant's owner. The absence of Soviet advisors in Bucharest only deepened this rift, encouraging party and union bosses at the factory level to openly dispute managerial prerogatives, especially those pertaining to the firing and hiring of personnel. The removal of Bobârnac was a direct consequence of the influence party bosses enjoyed at the factory level, an influence which was thought to seriously hinder production. The failure to meet plan targets for that year triggered an investigation into the tense relationship be-

⁶² ANCS, PMR, Comisia Județeană Reșița, 9/1950, p. 37. Simonenco was a firm believer that workers should acquire their skills at the point of production, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 91/1949, p. 102. Even the exiled social-democrat Gherman, for whom the Sovroms were "Russian" imperialist devices for plundering his native Romania of all her resources, had this to say about Reșița's Soviet managers: "Nevertheless, we have to admit the two directors Serghienko and Simonenco, appointed by the Soviets, proved themselves capable, bringing real gains to Reșița. The first was a wonderful technician, the second a skilled organizer. The other Soviet directors that came after did nothing but ruin what these two created.", *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 22. Not much is known about Serghienko apart from the fact that in August 1947 he introduced a special bonus system for metalworkers working in dangerous conditions (heat, toxicity), thus lifting their wages above the average, ANR, UDR, 306/1947, pp. 3–5.

⁶³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 72/1948, p. 39.

⁶⁴ IBIDEM, p. 30.

tween the managerial staff and the so-called “mass organizations.” Let us try to decipher the report's conclusions.

Investigators attributed the underperformance of the plant to a runaway conflict amplified after June 11, 1948 between party and union bosses and the technical personnel, particularly engineers who were in a state of “passivity”. This state was induced by the plethora of accusations thrown at them by party and union leaders who “waste no chance to insult them.”⁶⁵ Some of these insults were personal, others derived from a so-called “leftist” or “anarchist” attitude as party bosses failed to understand why engineers earned more than they did and why they should not be mocked for “living at the expense of the workers.”⁶⁶ The new general manager, Oniga, was caught in the line of fire. On the one hand, he could not exercise even basic managerial control over the labor process without the consent of the party and the factory committee. Moving people from one section of the factory to another according to the needs of production was impossible; and so too were minor attempts at rationalizing the labor process. For instance, the introduction of the production diagram was rejected on the grounds it was a “fascist method”. On the other hand, the plant's financial resources as stipulated by the collective labor contract were vociferously claimed by union delegates. Oniga, although he set regular office hours, could not prevent visits during worktime: “they went so far that workers' delegates came to me to push for social demands (*revendicări sociale*) in the name of the trade-union.”⁶⁷

Malaxa Works remained a conflict zone even after Oniga left the plant in late 1950.⁶⁸ The next two general managers – Teodorescu and Dumitrașcu – were equally unsuccessful in asserting managerial authority and organizing an uninterrupted chain of command that could reduce the pressure from the party and union bosses. In this context, the plant's newspaper *Viața Uzinei* – launched in May 1949 – was the main vehicle of the struggles. Workers' relocation from one section to another, for example, appeared in its pages as an attempt of a malevolent engineer to break up well-trodden work collectives.⁶⁹ In face-to-face en-

⁶⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 71/1949, p. 12.

⁶⁶ IBIDEM.

⁶⁷ IBIDEM, p. 55. Some of these demands included the use of the plant's cars for trade-union affairs and the curious suggestion that the general manager guarantee that workers buy home appliances on credit from Bucharest's Ferometal shop.

⁶⁸ In one of his last meetings summoned as general manager, Oniga noted rather euphemistically that, in spite of his personal efforts, party and union bosses still do not collaborate with the technical personnel, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 37/1950, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Radu Ioan, “Lipsuri în colaborarea dintre muncitori și tehnicienii la Edile și Construcții”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 1. May 1, 1949.

counters, during meetings or episodes of contention, engineers and functionaries could be accused of sabotage, arguably the most powerful discursive resource available at the hands of trade-union and party bosses. The break-down of a machine, a work accident or a fire were occasions for “class enemies” to be ferreted out and bullied from among the managerial staff. The head of the forging workshop – engineer Drogeanu – a rough character known to have boosted armament production during the war became completely “inactive” and suggested the plant be shut down because “workers indulge in politics (*muncitorii fac politică*)”.⁷⁰ The engineer had been a victim of workers’ libels. In another section of the plant, a party leader was reportedly bossing around foremen, taking upon himself the task of distributing workloads.⁷¹

The protracted process of instituting managerial authority at Malaxa Works following June 11, 1948 was arguably detrimental to fulfilling production targets. Ministerial authorities, top communist party bosses and Soviet advisors were certainly of the conviction that higher output comes with a strict factory hierarchy, the “sole leadership” principle emanating downwards from the director’s office to the shopfloors. Hierarchy was not inimical to party politics, if the latter touched on issues not immediately relevant to the labor process. Hierarchy, however, was not simply about allocating workloads, assigning norms and obeying the commands of foremen, workshop supervisors or engineers. It was equally about controlling the factory’s financial resources, particularly as money reached out into the realm of social reproduction. Determining the priority of investments within the plant’s paternalistic institutions was an issue in which most everyone had an interest: male and female workers, engineers, party leaders, the general manager, the employees of the medical cabinet or of the daycare.

4.4 The Logic of Investment

Socialist realist playwright Lucia Demetrius might have needed the watchful eye of censorship to properly emplot nationalization in her widely successful play *Cumpăna* (1949) simply because it was far from clear what nationalization was really about and how its transformative impact on ordinary workers should be depicted in narrative form. Demetrius’s experience as an office clerk with Malaxa Works’s social assistance department during the late 1930s might not have helped the author to tell the story of nationalization as an event, but it certainly came

⁷⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 60/1950, p. 19.

⁷¹ IBIDEM, p. 33.

in handy for another play she wrote about the social function that industrial plants acquired after June 11, 1948. Published in the mid-1950s, *Cei de mâine* (The Ones to Come) is the author's lesser-known and arguably least successful play. Unlike nationalization, the topics broached in this play were not narrative puzzles but rather hotly debated, public issues of the time: managerial authority, factory welfare, women's double burden and the all-pervasive question of investments in industry. Equally public and publicized was what brought these themes together, namely, the future of children as socialist citizens. Demetrius might have known something about these topics given her personal trajectory and it is not hard to imagine what she might have seen upon visiting Bucharest's mid-century working-class districts.

She might have seen, as sociologist Natalia Popovici revealed in a short study published during the war, that it was only the young and unmarried women, the widows and those abandoned that took up day jobs, seldom regular employment. She might have also seen that the vast majority of these women could not but leave their children unattended “on the streets in the company of the other kids.”⁷² It is plausible to suppose Demetrius wrote the character of Catrina, a recently abandoned mother of three living on the outskirts of the capital city, with this social landscape in mind.

Catrina was a typical figure of the early 1950s: a former washerwoman and a single mother who took up a job in industry partly because this was now openly encouraged by the communist authorities, partly because her husband left her for another woman.⁷³ Catrina would constantly ask the general manger to invest in the extension of the factory's overcrowded daycare so that it could take in her kids as well. The manager, and old-time communist named Petru, was equally characteristic: he took offence in criticism coming “from below”, was over-worked, dreaming of building a model metal factory, complained of not having sufficient funds for investments and gave priority to buying new machines over the enlargement of the daycare. The play's plot is rather predictable: the manager

⁷² Natalia Popovici, “Influence du travail de la femme sur la vie de famille”, *Archives pour la science et la reforme sociales*, XVI, No.1–4, 1943, 132.

⁷³ In one way or another, the “typical figure” embodied by Catrina was at the center of socialist industrial development. See, for example, the opening story of Krystyna W. – a young mother of two who entered Poland's Silesian coal mines in 1952 – in Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–3. In the same vein Natalia Jarska, “Rural Women, Gender Ideologies, and Industrialization in State Socialism. The Case of a Polish Factory in the 1950s”, *Aspasia*, Vol. 9, 2015, 65–86. See also Shana Penn and Jill Massino (eds.) *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2009).

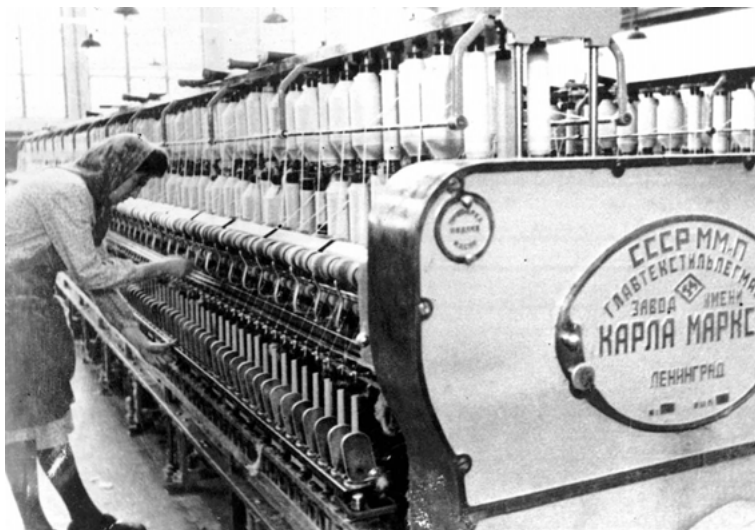


Image 8: *Textile factory worker, Botoșani, 1952; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 184/1952*

would learn through criticism and self-criticism to value the social function of factories in liberating women and breeding the next generation of socialist workers.

The type of conflict portrayed by *Cei de mâine* is a good starting point to think about the structural limits and inherent dynamic of struggles over the allocation of resources at the point of production. These struggles were indeed very often about issues of social reproduction yet they rarely, if ever, took the form of women workers asking for their rights to welfare facilities. Before examining in some detail why this was the case, we need to know more about the type of industrial paternalism inaugurated by June 11, 1948.

Post-nationalization paternalism not only retained but also built on many of the features that historically defined UDR's and Malaxa Works' varieties of paternalism. The goal of producing stable, skilled and loyal workers remained unchanged, even amplified, and thus there were conspicuous lines of continuity between paternalist practices enacted before and after the June 11 divide. However, it is important to note the ways in which post-nationalization paternalism marked a break with company tradition to the extent that it grounded (and implicitly justified) the provisioning of factory welfare on a general notion of "social wage" (*salariu social*). In principle the social wage included all the benefits that wage earners enjoyed at the point of production, as both wage earners *and* socialist citizens: access to free medical care, cheap meals at the canteen, low

rents on the factory's housing estate, subsidized transportation for commuters, the possibility of using the daycare, paid holidays etc.

More importantly, the social wage also encompassed social insurance, which was now relocated at the factory level and placed under the combined administration of trade-union delegates and lower management. Yet none of these components of the social wage could be adequately quantified and although they were included in the collective labor contracts, few had the status of social rights. On the contrary, this type of welfare depended on both the ability of the factory to fulfil the plan, and on the struggles over the distribution of resources that unfolded along the chain of command. Both aspects derived from the radical transformation in the nature of collective labor contracts after 1948.

Two aspects of this transformation were paramount for the redefinition of industrial paternalism. The first concerned what communist party bosses called the contracts' "confused and clumsy" character, namely the fact that historically, collective labor contracts in Romania lumped together issues of wage policy, social insurance and social assistance, work safety, transportation subsidies and various other obligations companies agreed to observe for the benefit of their employees such as daycares, housing, marriage bonuses etc. Also, the postwar contracts imposed by CGM added the responsibility of providing employees with subsidized basic consumer items via factory stores to the already existing duties of the management. The collective contracts, beginning in 1949, did away with this alleged confusion by splitting up and reallocating most of these obligations: wage policy would be set by the state via its ministries, workers' rights would be protected by a new labor code, social insurance would be regulated by law and administered by trade-unions, while rules of discipline would be spelled out in codes of conduct authored by management alone.⁷⁴

The second transformation targeted the very object of the contract, which was no longer just "living labor" collectively represented by union delegates but also the production plan.⁷⁵ This was indeed an absolute legal novelty of dis-

74 Liuba Chişinevschi, *Noul contract colectiv* (Bucharest: Editura Confederaţiei Generale a Muncii, 1949), 10.

75 Non-Soviet inspired collective labor contracts, including the two enacted by CGM in 1946 and 1947, were built, as all labor law is, around the impossibility of separating labor as a commodity from the body of its seller (or "living labor" in its Marxian original). The rights of the worker inscribed in the collective labor contracts derived exclusively from its subjection to the employer rather than, as in the Soviet case, from fulfilling production targets in addition to subjection. On the *aporia* of traditional "European" labor law see Alain Supiot, *Critique du droit du travail* (Paris: P.U.F., 2011), 60 – 63.

tinctively Soviet provenance.⁷⁶ The production plan was inserted into the contracts as blank spaces to be filled up with numbers: “here you will write down the plan requirements for 1952 in absolute values or percentages as compared to the one for 1951; the global production expressed in lei, the labor productivity, production costs [...]”.⁷⁷ Blank spaces, however, were not only reserved for the production targets to be reached but also for investments in welfare at the factory level: “the factory is obliged to use the investment funds, the director’s funds and the social insurance budget administered by the trade-union to build houses for workers amounting to ... lei; locker rooms, showers, barracks worth ... lei.”⁷⁸ The blank spaces, then, were apparently invitations to negotiate between the two legal corporate fictions engaged in the contract: management and the factory committee. Yet these were always constrained negotiations since the amount allocated for issues of welfare was conditioned on the fulfillment of the plan: on paper, the money available for investments, for the social insurance budget or for the director’s fund were distributed in accordance with the performance of the respective industrial unit. This did not make the blank spaces any less negotiable, as both CGM and the workers themselves took them seriously out of necessity.

An investigation pursued by CGM in late 1951 revealed that many factories ignored their obligations on the ground that, since they were unable to fulfil the production plan, they lacked investment funds. After two years of experimenting with the new collective labor contracts, the mood was grim indeed: “Unless we take urgent measures, we will find ourselves at the end of 1951 just like one year ago with factory management not observing the obligations deriving from the collective labor contracts, which would only make workers lose faith in them.”⁷⁹ For the workers, particularly for those toiling in hazardous conditions without proper working equipment, appealing to the collective labor contract was a desperate matter of last resort. For instance, disgruntled employees of a wood processing facility lacking working clothes wrote a protest memo and sent it together with a copy of the collective contract to management and ministerial authorities.⁸⁰ CGM representatives were therefore wrong to fear that workers might begin to regard the new contracts as a mere legal sham with no bind-

⁷⁶ For a brief genealogy of the relation between numbers and Soviet labor law see Alain Supiot, *La gouvernance par les nombres. Cours au Collège de France (2012–2014)*, (Paris: Fayard, 2015), Chapter 6.

⁷⁷ ANR, PCM, 29/1952, p. 3.

⁷⁸ IBIDEM.

⁷⁹ ANR, PCM, 200/1951, p. 2.

⁸⁰ They never received an answer, ANR, PCR, 146/1951, p. 46.

ing power over management. Out of the 3,758 collective labor contracts signed across industry in 1951, the vast majority were found to have been violated by management, notably in the realm of “social investment” (*investiții sociale*). This was simply because many small and medium-sized factories were unable to fulfil the production plan.

Industrial giants such as UDR or Malaxa Works were too big to fail. Their importance to the national economy and the transnational Soviet joint-stock commercial empire secured them some investments funds for them even when production plans were not reached. This allowed UDR's management to continue its local paternalist tradition of subsidizing workers' and functionaries' accommodation in town and investing in the development of new housing for its employees. Faced with a mounting housing crisis by the late 1940s, Reșița retained its status as a company town, with housing and rent subsidies remaining the two main managerial devices for controlling local labor supply.⁸¹

During the immediate postwar period construction efforts were few and far between, with a first major investment project scheduled for 1947. UDR promised to build 110 houses for married workers: one big room, a small kitchen, a surrounding garden, running water and electricity would allow over 220 families to settle in the town.⁸² Nevertheless, company housing was scarce and mostly geared towards servicing white rather than blue-collar workers. Out of the 1,216 technical personnel residing in the town in 1948, only 297 owned private houses, over 400 were accommodated on UDR's housing estate while the rest were given rent subsidies. By contrast, out of the 8,015 resident blue-collar workers only 1,665 owned their own houses, leaving over 6000 in need of monthly rent money.⁸³ In postwar Reșița – a local journalist noted – one “did not rent a room, only a bed.”⁸⁴ It was in this context that housing projects dating back to the war period were revived after nationalization, most notably in the so-

81 On the link between work, residence and labor control as the defining trait of company towns see Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres, “Company Towns: Concepts, Historiography, and Approaches”, in Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres (eds.) *Company Towns. Labor, Space, and Power Relations across Time and Continents* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 9–10.

82 “La Reșița se construiesc 110 case familiale muncitorești”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 763, April 4 1947. It is not clear how many of these houses were finished, if any.

83 ANR, UDR, 208/1948.

84 Toma George Maiorescu, *Geneze la borna stelară* (Reșița: Editura TIM, 2013), 220. Maiorescu (b. 1928) was one of the first local journalists employed by the postwar regional communist daily *Luptătorul Bănățean* to write about his native town.

called Lunca Pomostului – an area UDR expropriated from villagers as early as 1942 in order to build individual houses for workers.⁸⁵



Image 9: “Universal” – General store, Reșița, early 1960s; Source: Postcard

Lines of continuity can be seen between the underlining stress on domesticity and the expansion of the apartment stock. Characteristically, inaugurated in 1952, Reșița’s remarkable symbolic building of the first postwar construction boom was a large general store selling a wide variety of goods. The ideology of domesticity linked shop floor and public space in an overarching celebration of the duties of family life. In August 1949, the town’s cooperative decided to reward the most productive workers by offering to freely transport goods to their place of residence so that “their wives won’t waste time strolling around shops, picking up rationed goods, and would use their time for the good of the family, therefore contributing to bettering the lives of those who build socialism in our country.”⁸⁶ The good of the family was the duty of the husband as

⁸⁵ Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reșița, 1771–1996* (Reșița: Editura Timpul, 1996), 103. See also ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 24 according to which the plan of building houses in Lunca Pomostului dated from 1945. In any case, the Lunca Pomostului housing project was the second largest investment project financed by the Ministry of Industry in 1948 after Hunedoara, ANR, *Ministerul Economiei Naționale*, 3/1948. For the latter see Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre furnalul roșu. Urbanism și cotidian în Hunedoara și Călan* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).

⁸⁶ ANCS, *Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița*, 25/1949, p. 284.

well, whose spare time could not be wasted on young women, parties or booze. Both the local newspaper and trade-union bosses carried occasional moralizing campaigns to push workers out of their loss of “interest in the education of the children and household chores.”⁸⁷ Discipline was also required for the children of the families who moved into the new apartments of Lunca Pomostului, many of whom “slam the doors disturbing the peace of the other residents.”⁸⁸ Under the post-nationalization paternalism, Reșița was to become a town of rooted families rather than one of loose, male tenants. Children could aspire to a career in the plant via the network of vocational schools jointly sponsored by local authorities and UDR's management, with the end result of the company securing a stable flow of reliable workers. The beginning was modest, yet hopeful:

Thus, for example, this year [1949] we had planned to build 300 working-class flats, out of which only 120 will be finished with great delay. The same applies for the apprentices' school and canteen, as well as their dorm. We also planned to build another dorm with a capacity of 600 places but up until this moment construction work did not take off. The same goes for the daycare of the Romanilor Street which should cater to those families where both mother and father work.⁸⁹

Turning Reșița into a company town of nuclear families was a long process. For most of the 1950s, it was merely a paternalist dream amidst a quicksand urban landscape crisscrossed by commuting male metalworkers (*navetiști*).⁹⁰ UDR's investment plan for 1949 is telling in this respect: out of the total budget only 15% went for so-called “social investments” (housing, vocational training buildings, crèches etc.), 22% for maintenance operations of industrial equipment and over 62% for the expansion of production capacity.⁹¹ Though I was unable to find any data for the following years, I suspect this basic distribution was maintained at least up until Sovrom was disbanded in 1954 and perhaps well into the late 1950s. The town's urban growth only took off in the 1960s with the construction

87 “O femeie își caută soțul”, *Flamura roșie*, No. 30, July 17 1949.

88 ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 27/1950, p. 293.

89 “Să asigurăm uzinelor brațele de muncă și să intensificăm grija față de ele”, *Flamura roșie*, No. 49, November 27 1949. For the full list of “social investments” scheduled for 1949 see ANR, UDR, 347/1948, pp. 8–9.

90 For a typology of the commuter see Z. Bejenaru, “Deplasări pentru lucru la Uzinele Reșița”, in N.A. Rădulescu (ed.) *Lucrările seminarului de geografie economică, 1941–1946* (Bucharest: Academia de Înalte Studii Comerciale și Industriale, 1946), 105–107. In 1948, over 25% of the total workforce employed by UDR in Reșița was commuting from nearby villages on foot, by bus and by train.

91 ANR, UDR, 77/1948, p. 117.

of Lunca Bârzavei, a district that would come to accommodate over 60 % of the local population.⁹²

Structural investments (*investiții capitale*) of this sort, however, were not the only source of money for financing the institutions of managerial paternalism. Two additional mechanisms complemented it: the first was bank loans; the second was known as “the director’s fund”.⁹³ The latter was another legal innovation introduced by the collective labor contracts, enacted in 1949, of explicit Soviet lineage: a special amount of money was retained from the company’s annual profit to be used for investments in the factory’s social function as well as for giving out bonuses to norm breakers, Stakhanovists, and other productive workers.⁹⁴ How the director’s fund was spent was a contentious matter that came to shape everyday politics at the factory level throughout the 1950s. It was also a public matter, as workers were formally required to debate the investment priorities and make suggestions. Although initially, like other prescriptions set out in the new labor contracts, this fund was dependent on the fulfillment of the production plan, in late 1955, a governmental decree made the director’s fund easier to access i.e. less dependent on fulfilling the plan, and thus implicitly acknowledging it had become the main source for supporting factory welfare.⁹⁵ Given Loncear’s authority and Simonenco’s expertise in Soviet management, the decision as to how to spend the director’s fund in Reșița was taken between the two. Union delegates, while aware that such a fund existed, were nevertheless rather uninformed about its use, arguably because they knew they could exert little control over investments.⁹⁶ It was in fact Simonenco who designed the first spending plan for 1950, allocating a monthly budget of one million lei for the director’s fund: 200,000 lei for building or repairing daycares, hostels, and canteens; 300,000 lei for money prizes awarded to norm

⁹² Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reșița, 1771 – 1996* (Reșița: Editura Timpul, 1996), 133 *et passim*.

⁹³ Loans, even when they were granted by banks, required massive paperwork and a bureaucracy to support it, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 75/1951, p. 25 for the effort to build a park with a loan in Reșița.

⁹⁴ For the *Direktorfonds* in GDR see Sandrine Kott, *Le communisme au quotidien. Les entreprises d’État dans la société est-allemande* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 77, 86 – 87. Kott argues the social policy financed through the director’s fund constituted a form of paternalism the goal of which was to instill company loyalty.

⁹⁵ ANR, PCM, 53/1956. The same decree reduced the percentage of the director’s fund to be spent on bonuses for productive workers from 25 % to 10 % with the hope of forcing managers to invest more in welfare facilities at the factory level.

⁹⁶ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 27/1950, p. 89 asked about whether the director’s fund would be used for housing, one union boss replied in the negative.

breakers; 200,000 lei for the acquisition of musical instruments for the plant's choir and sporting equipment, mountain trips, books and magazines; and finally 300,000 lei for so-called individual aid given to needy employees following a work accident, a death of a family member, sudden illness and other unpredictable events. For the second half of 1950, the monthly budget was raised by 50% which almost doubled investments in housing, canteens, kindergartens and day-cares.⁹⁷

Malaxa Works in Bucharest craved such clarity in the way the fund was spent. Here, as the person in charge of the plant's medical office – doctor Weintraub – noted, the general manager always claimed funds were lacking, funds which then often “popped up as if by miracle following an investigation.”⁹⁸ Published in the plant's newspaper, Weintraub's article was a form of lobbying on behalf of the 14 medical doctors employed by the plant to take care of its workforce, including the employees' children.⁹⁹ In making it clear that the medical office needed at least a car for transporting patients, the doctor was staking out a claim on the director's fund and throwing in a jab at the director's moral composure. Naturally, Weintraub was not alone in launching a struggle over investments in the pages of *Viața Uzinei*. The plant's newspaper was the ideal medium for similar claims to be voiced. For example, workers of the metal repair section allegedly told the reporter: “We ask comrade director Oniga whether he knows the location of our workshop? We never saw him take any interest in the harsh conditions under which we work.”¹⁰⁰ They were asking for some money in order to consolidate the walls of the workshop while complaining that the new bosses of the factory “forgot they come from among us and by turning a deaf ear to the masses they cut themselves off from us.”¹⁰¹ Money was also required for the plant's daycare as comrade Maria Ionescu made it clear in a virulent article in which she argued that “our daycare is part and parcel of the social wage”.¹⁰²

This argument was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was used by authorities to justify low wages. The official womens' magazine *Femeia* regularly

⁹⁷ IBIDEM, pp. 7–9. To get a sense of these figures, it is worth mentioning here that the average wage of a skilled metalworker in late 1949 was well under 9,000 lei.

⁹⁸ Șura Weintraub, “Dispensarul nostru”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 13, November 7 1949.

⁹⁹ For more on what authorities considered a “model” medical office see *Viața Capitalei*, No. 326, May 20 1950.

¹⁰⁰ *Viața Uzinei*, No. 18, January 15 1950.

¹⁰¹ IBIDEM, p. 3.

¹⁰² Maria Ionescu, “Lucruri ce trebuiesc remediate la creșă de copii”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 44, January 23 1951.

explained how women workers receive not merely cash money on payday but also the “social wage” such as, for instance, keeping their children in the factory’s daycare.¹⁰³ On the other hand, women in charge of the daycare at the factory level found in the notion of “social wage” a ready-made rhetorical device that could be employed to articulate demands within the limits of the official discourse. This strategy allowed comrade Maria Ionescu to complain about the lack of adequate milk for the children, to ask for medicine and a larger building. One month later she complained again about the difficulties of buying a laundry dryer.¹⁰⁴

The actual outcomes of these struggles over the distribution of the director’s fund are hard to assess. The collective labor contract that marked the onset of the First Five Year Plan in 1951 mentioned none of these bones of contention. It spoke of housing for unmarried young male workers “who live outside of the city”; of an open swimming pool, a theater and cinema hall, reading rooms, a neighborhood park and of the need to build a so-called “palace of culture”.¹⁰⁵ An investigation conducted at the plant revealed that the contract had been severely violated with the exception of the daycare, which received a new wood storeroom and 70 of its children were sent to a summer camp for free.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, unlike in Reșița, the plant’s resources seldom spilled outside of its walls. It was the local municipality who singlehandedly financed housing in the neighborhood, although, for symbolic reasons, Malaxa Works did offer to help with construction material when needed. Things were not much better in 1952. With the exception of a barbershop that had opened on the premises of the plant to cater to the needs of the workers at lower prices, the contract was again apparently ignored. An angry article by one of the union bosses listed everything the management had failed to invest in: showers, tables for the canteen, dentistry equipment, the cinema hall and finally a soccer stadium in the nearby neighborhood of Balta Albă. It is no coincidence that the soccer stadium – more of a sport field in fact – was finally built under the management of comrade Constantin Putinică, the plant first general “manager-worker” appointed in 1953.¹⁰⁷

The rise and fall of Putinică between 1953 and 1957 might help us to better understand how paternalism, managerial authority and the gendered struggles

103 Ada Bârseanu, “Pentru bunăstarea oamenilor muncii”, *Femeia*, No. 2, March 1950.

104 “Unde duce birocratismul”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 48, February 28 1951.

105 “Cum vor crește Uzinele ‘23 August’ în cursul primului an al Cincinalului”, *Viața Capitalei*, No. 326, July 11 1950.

106 ANR, PCM, 18/1951, p. 43.

107 To be confused with the “23 August” – Bucharest’s largest sport arena – built in the mid-1950s and located two kilometers away from the plant.

over factory welfare deeply structured investment priorities. In many ways the appointment of Putinică as head of Malaxa Works marked a turning point in the trajectory of the plant as the new director successfully consolidated managerial authority while also muting much of the criticism published by *Viața Uzinei*. Indeed, a close reading of the factory newspaper under Putinică's leadership shows not only a dwindling number of articles claiming the financial resources of the director's fund, but also a complete disappearance of references to the person and personality of the general manager. How, then, did Putinică achieve such a remarkable feat, both securing authority for himself and silencing demands from below? Or to put it differently, how did he succeed in sheltering the director's fund from the claim-making propensity of medical doctors, ordinary metalworkers (women and men alike), employees of the daycare, of the canteen or of any other institution of the "social wage"?

Part of the answer lies in the first article published under Putinică's name shortly after his appointment, which was an ode to the authority of the foreman on the shop floor. Putinică's success rested on his ability to reinforce factory hierarchy, an effort that involved episodes of camaraderie, mixing masculinity with attention to manly concerns. The complex chain of command linking lower management to engineers, planners, accountants and top directors – a hierarchical decision-making process historian Yves Cohen called *l'entrechef* – was exclusively male.¹⁰⁸

On paper, Constantin Putinică was the dream manager of the 1950s. Born in 1911 to a land-owning peasant family, his professional trajectory on the interwar labor market took him to Brăila, Cluj, Bucharest, Brașov and Râșnov. He was a mechanic with the national railway company until 1934; a salesman for a couple of months; a cleaning man and an office clerk in the capital city; again a mechanic with the aerospace manufacturer IAR between 1939 and 1941; and finally a norm checker and a functionary of a small factory in Southern Transylvania for much of the war up until 1949. Putinică was also a communist militant involved in the underground operations of the party. Sentenced to twenty years of political imprisonment during the war he was lucky to spend no more than eight days in jail. The end of the war found Putinică caught up in the struggles over workers' representation as the leader of a factory committee. A family man and faithful party member, Putinică worked for the Ministry of Industry after 1949. In 1952, he was appointed general manager of a factory in the town of Târ-

108 Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890–1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 644. In the Soviet Union of the interwar epoch, Cohen argues, *l'entrechef* was based on the exclusion of women.

goviște, from where he left for a managerial position with Sovromtractor – the Soviet-Romanian joint-stock tractor manufacturing company located in the town of Brașov. Here, Putinică might have acquired the basics of the “sole leadership” principle first-hand from Soviet advisers like Supikașvili.

In early 1953, Constantin Putinică was called upon to take up the more challenging task of managing Malaxa Works, a factory known for its recalcitrant party and union bosses.¹⁰⁹ It took more than three years for the party and union bosses of the plant to orchestrate the downfall of Putinică. In an unsigned note that reached the Central Committee in late 1956, the general manager was denounced for having hired his own sons and for bringing over 500 of his close associates from Brașov to work in the factory. These people, the note explained, were used as spies; a fact that gained Putinică the derogatory nickname “the general”: “doesn’t he understand workers see all this and badmouth him?”¹¹⁰ In addition to his allegedly rough manners, what really brought the director into ill repute among Malaxa Works’s employees was Putinică’s habit of throwing parties, particularly for his protégées and patrons. Among the latter, persons of influence were singled out at the municipal level who supposedly protected Putinică. The note was followed a couple of months later by an investigation by party and ministerial officials. Let us now try to make sense of what they discovered at Malaxa Works by attending to their report.

The team of investigators found Putinică was an excellent pupil of the “sole leadership” principle: “every time the party committee or the trade-union attempted to follow up workers’ complaints, he accused them of wanting to attack him personally.”¹¹¹ Moreover, “any attempt to single out the guilty was considered by him a personal affront, an attack to his prestige as leader (*conducător*).”¹¹² Neither party nor union bosses at the factory level could exert control over Putinică. It was not easier for state authorities such as the “economic police” (*miliția economică*), a brigade of which was kicked out of the factory while attempting to investigate a case of theft. As for opportunities for the employees to voice their opinions, in print or otherwise, Putinică was accused of “strangling criticism from below”.

There is hardly anything new in these remarks; the tone was reminiscent of the immediate post-nationalization struggles over the nature of managerial authority. What was new in the report was the following astute observation

109 This fragment builds on Putinică’s party biography, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, Dosare Anexe, 51/1956.

110 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 99/1957, p. 4.

111 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 20/1958, p. 29.

112 IBIDEM.

about factory hierarchy: “between the sole leadership (the general manager of the plant) and his subordinates (*executanți*) there is a compact layer of dubious people who have no interest in fulfilling workers’ demands.”¹¹³ The most blatantly ignored demand of the workers was to have a say in matters pertaining to the spending of the director’s fund. Putinică, however, retained absolute control of the fund and spent it together with the “dubious people”. Who, then, made up this so-called group?

Firstly, there were the 189 foremen, 53 of whom were overqualified young engineers promoted by Putinică. Secondly, there were the workshop supervisors (*șefii de secții*) whom the general manager used to call to his office on a daily basis to discuss issues related to production. Thirdly, there were men with experience, long time employees of the plant who survived all political regimes from the late 1930s onwards. Sure, the report painted grim portraits of these men in the vernacular of everyday struggle, accusing them of having beaten up workers in the past, of making shady business with state money and of being morally corrupt if not politically dangerous. Hardly surprising, Putinică’s effort to restore managerial authority and establish factory hierarchy along the chain of command meant that he “not only tolerated but even supported them”.¹¹⁴ These were men whom Putinică trusted to run the factory, including the distribution of the director’s fund. Money could therefore be spent on building a sport field for soccer games, for giving bonuses to football players and, more importantly, for “buying” football players from other factories of the capital city.¹¹⁵ Equally, the director’s fund was used for financing “parties”.

Shortly after nationalization, Malaxa Works became the key industrial complex to be visited by foreign delegations. Engineers, poets, political figures, journalists and even ordinary workers were often taken on a tour of the plant. Putinică saw in these visits opportunities to organize collective meals, sometimes even in the company of paid women dancers.¹¹⁶ For many on the factory’s hierarchy these were also opportunities to bond, team-building moments that greased the flow of command as it trickled down from the main office to the shop floors. Small wonder that the amount of money spent on these parties was staggering: “no matter how much food there was and no matter what hotel they were put

¹¹³ IBIDEM, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ IBIDEM, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Buying football players was a literal phrase in the report. What this could mean is that Putinică used the director’s funds to transfer workers who played the game from other factories offering then better working conditions and bonuses.

¹¹⁶ For a Hungarian delegation, Putinică even hired the famed group of dancers “Paris on Ice” (*Parisul pe gheață*).

into, a single human being cannot consume that much.”¹¹⁷ Of course, the passion for soccer, good food and women dancers could not deplete the director’s fund in its entirety. The general manager also used it to more personal ends, such as the acquisition of a photo camera and the siphoning of construction material necessary for his own private house. It would be an exaggeration, however, to consider Putinică’s manner of spending the director’s fund a form of corruption. Anachronisms apart, for the investigators it was something much worse, namely a case-study of a director of working-class pedigree and communist faith “losing class feeling (*simț de clasă*) and the sense of direction a proper leader should have.”¹¹⁸

On the one hand, it was an infringement of the plant’s variety of paternalism. Under Putinică’s leadership, investments in housing plummeted, meals at the canteen got worse and the needs of women workers were arguably pushed back even in terms of entertainment, let alone social reproduction. Moreover, the reinforcement of the male dominated factory hierarchy could not but reinforce men’s customary disdain for women working in metal industries.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Putinică’s success in securing a degree of autonomy for the chain of command, above and beyond the reach of party bosses at the factory level was a risky affair that finally backfired. Granted, it gave the general manager absolute control over financial resources and a free hand in spending the director’s fund, but it also exposed him (and those close to him) to a more devastating form of criticism than that which he might have received in the pages of *Viața Uzinei* (had he allowed it).

The downfall of Putinică, although couched in a rhetoric of conspicuous consumption and reckless spending, came as a consequences of the plant’s chronic underperformance.¹²⁰ Indeed, the investigation that brought down the general manager was motivated less by what Putinică did and more by what he could not do, namely reach production targets. That the plan could not be

117 IBIDEM, p. 15.

118 IBIDEM, p. 31.

119 Before Putinică’s stint, it was still possible for the party organization at the factory level to scold and shame those foremen unwilling to accept women workers. It was also possible for the party to punish workshop supervisors such as Carol Schwager for “performing abject gestures” before recently employed women wanting to learn the craft. The same went for men such as comrade Orbeșteanu who lied about being married in order to take advantage of fellow women workers on and off the shopfloor. AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 37/1950, pp. 43–45.

120 The investigation was triggered by Malaxa Works failing again to meet production targets in 1956 and asking the Ministry of Industry to bail it out by providing it with money for the director’s fund.

executed in an industrial plant where, as the report put it, the party was “weak” in relation to the technical and managerial staff suggests that not even unencumbered factory hierarchy and a chain of command unhindered by the nuisances of everyday politics could have produced a higher output. This example, then, suggests that the problem of securing managerial authority during the postwar period might have been less contingent than expected by the leaders of the communist party. To be sure, the scramble over social investment at the factory level, the overlapping claims to rule of party members, union representatives and managers as well as the influence of Soviet advisors were factors that mattered in the process of enforcing hierarchy and obtaining control over the chain of command. However, the real testing ground was the labor process: the ways in which the workers themselves, due to their skill and ability to forge solidarities on the shop floor, could hope to wrest a degree of mastery over the pace and rhythms of work and rest, over access to higher pay and better tools. Rationalizing the labor process against the background of repressed consumption, low wages and high wage dispersion was the great challenge that industrial managers faced throughout the 1950s.

Chapter V

5 The Politics of Productivity (1950 – 1958)

5.1 Paper Lives

Little did engineer Silviu Sepi know that one day he would reach the heights of his profession as the head of UDR's steelworks section (oțelărie) and deputy vice manager of the entire steel mill in Reșița. For much of the war, Sepi had been in charge of the apprentices' dormitory where he was allegedly enforcing a draconian disciplinary regime on the young workers. Come November 1944, he was singled out in the communist press for his brutality and for having been something of a fascist.¹ One newspaper article adduced evidence in support of these claims and proposed for the engineer to be immediately purged.² Yet Sepi survived the wave of purging activity that seized UDR at the time unscathed. Luck, circumstance and political sympathies saved him.³ How exactly Sepi ended up catapulted to the helm of the steelworks section is less clear. Membership in the communist party was a precondition, but so too might have been his professional standing as well as his ability to navigate the pressure stemming from party peers and management. Local party archives show Sepi taking his communism seriously: he engaged in regular exercises of criticism and self-criticism during meetings and suggested ways of educating the "backward" commuting workers. At the same time Sepi took his engineering equally seriously: he kicked nosy party activists out of his office, openly favored the foremen of his section and refused to report overblown production figures to nagging journalists keen on popularizing plan achievements.⁴

1 "Se cere purificare la Reșița. Abuzurile fasciștilor și parveniților prohitleriști la UDR", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 57, November 19 1944.

2 In addition, Sepi was suspected of collaborating to Stavila, the only non-communist newspaper published in Reșița between November 1944 and April 1945; see *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 77 December 11 1944.

3 Sepi was supposed to be purged together with Boitan and Staricu in January 1945; see ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 6. Ironically, as early as 1942 the secret police (*Siguranța*) put Sepi under surveillance for communist sympathies and "anti-Romanian feelings" together with two other UDR engineers, Ivancenco and Licev; ANR, Colecția Nr. 50, 2828, pp. 1–2.

4 ANCS, PCR, Comitetul Municipal Reșița, 1/1951, p. 273; IBIDEM, 8/1951, p. 18 Sepi admits before his communist comrades that he "put the interests of production before party life (*viața de partid*)."



Image 10: Foreman Matei Stubnya (back) overseeing a team of steelworkers, Reșița; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 181/1950.

Communist engineers like Silviu Sepi were ideally suited (if not outrightly demanded) to become authors of the productivity discourse that spread across socialist Romania throughout the 1950s.⁵ Myriad ways of increasing productivity in industry were presented in tens of books, dozens of brochures, hundreds of scholarly articles, thousands of newspaper columns and an endless stream of translations from Soviet sources, not to mention innumerable lectures, conferences, speeches, meetings, official visits and informal talks. To contribute to this discourse, one had to be professionally and politically synched for, even though not all communist party members were excellent professionals, all excellent professionals in industry were required to be communist party members. Accordingly, as early as January 1950, Sepi's name was attached to an article that explained how labor productivity may increase in the steelworks section: the elimination of downtime (*timpi morți*), a flexible coordination between sections, more authority granted to foremen and an overall better organization of work

⁵ Following Foucault, by “author” and “authorship” I understand “a functional principle” that organizes the emergence, proliferation and circulation of texts and circumscribes their meaning. In this view, whether communist engineers like Sepi or workers like Căpuțan and Stubnya authored the texts they signed is beside the point, thought admittedly a topic worthy of future research; Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”, in James D. Faubion (ed.) *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Volume II* (New York: The New York Press, 1998), 205–222.

were singled out as prime resources that could secure more steel output.⁶ Professional audiences were more plausibly targeted via the brochure and the scholarly article. Widely circulated, Sepi's co-authored brochure was arguably the first to introduce the notion of "inner reserves" (*resurse interne*) – the conceptual staple of the rationalization drive of the 1950s:

The lengthening of the use time of industrial equipment is one of our most important reserves, being at the same time the easiest to put to use because it requires no special investments, only an organizational effort.⁷

The quest for "inner reserves" was hailed as the backbone of rationalization, a process which could encompass nearly every item located on the industrial landscape, from bodily motions and space to the built environment and time. In Reșița, Sepi argued, a more productive workspace was obtained by a thorough organization of the locker rooms; a trivial detail at first sight, yet one that saved cement, bricks and labor power from being wasted on a new construction: "the discovery and capitalization (*valorificare*) of each and every square meter of unused space is an important gain for the factory and for the economy."⁸ This discourse of productivity, no matter how much it seemed a carbon copy of the Soviet original, was nevertheless applicable to local conditions in postwar Romania. As Sepi himself was the first to admit, even a 10% increase in the use of fixed assets (*mijloace de bază*) would "yield a similar productive outcome as billions of lei invested in capital".⁹

This observation pointed to the simple fact that, at least for the first Five Year Plan (1951–1955), the sources of increased productivity were to be found predominantly in the combined organization of work and the rationalization of existing equipment, rather than in massive investments in technological upgrades. To be sure, capital input would not be completely absent, but the amount of money scheduled to be poured into the acquisition of new industrial equip-

⁶ Silviu Sepi, "Cum va putea Oțelăria Siemens Martin să-și ridice productivitatea", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 55, January 8 1950.

⁷ Silviu Sepi, Adolf Druker, Ion Lăzărescu, *Rezervele mijloacelor de bază ale industriei în slujba cincinalului* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1952), 24. Naturally, the notion of "inner reserves" was of Soviet parentage, earlier popularized through various translations; see A. Arakelian, *Rezervele întreprinderilor în slujba planului cincinal* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1951).

⁸ Silviu Sepi, Adolf Druker, Ion Lăzărescu, *Rezervele mijloacelor de bază ale industriei în slujba cincinalului* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1952), 16.

⁹ Silviu Sepi, Ioan Licev, Vladimir Popovici, "Colectivul tehnicienilor și muncitorilor de la 'Sovrommetal' Reșița a început lupta pentru îndeplinirea planului în 11 luni", *Probleme Economice*, No. 4–5, April-May, 1951, 167.

ment would nonetheless be modest.¹⁰ The state's chronic lack of financial resources throughout the 1950s only made the domestication of the discourse of productivity plausible in the eyes of engineers like Sepi. Yet, how could the same discourse of productivity be rendered plausible in the eyes of the workers, many of whom were now targeted for an intensified pace of work?

Communist workers, much like communist engineers, were also invited to join the authorship of the discourse on productivity. Take the case of Ion Căpuțan, a smelter manning the Siemens-Martin blast furnace No. 7 of the steel mill in Reșița. This name appears on one of the many brochures published in 1950 intended to popularize how workers in various industries understood increased productivity. Providing portraits of leading (*fruntaș*) workers in the steel, oil and gas, coal, construction, wood processing and transport industries, the project was inspired by the editorial practices of the Soviet trade-unions and managed to print over 79,000 copies, including translations in Hungarian and German.¹¹ The narrative was confessional: on a busy day in late April 1950, just about the time Căpuțan's team was preparing to load the furnace for the last time, allegedly in honor of May first, he was called to the office of the general manager. Fearing his brief absence would cause the precious load to be wasted, Căpuțan looked around the section for instruction from his boss – engineer Sepi – who was nowhere to be found. Upon reaching the office of the general manager, Căpuțan was greeted by Sepi himself, who was waiting to offer him the Work Medal in view of his outstanding record in production. The prize occasioned a moment of introspection for Căpuțan, who could not take his mind off the furnace:

A wasted load equals my wage as smelter for no less than 4 years; and losing the material means wasting the chance of constructing either 12 tractors or 1 kilometer and 200 meters of railway. I think these numbers speak for themselves.¹²

10 I am referring here strictly to investments in heavy industry (particularly metallurgy and machine building) which only picked up significantly in the late 1950s. As John Montias noted, the bulk of investments for much of the 1950s went to those industries “capable of yielding large amounts of foreign exchange” rather than to “industries traditionally associated with a development strategy of the Soviet type”, John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 35–36. It was the oil, lumber, and cement industries that attracted investments for the better half of the First Five Year Plan; all producing commodities that allowed for a rising level of exports.

11 See the review published in *Lupta de clasă*, No. 7–8, July–August 1950, 131–136.

12 Ion Căpuțan, *Reșița luptă pentru mai mult oțel* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1950), 16. Căpuțan was not the only worker-author of the brochure; his story was accompanied by three more biographies of leading workers of the steel mill in Reșița.

Perhaps these numbers did speak for themselves, but so too did the ones more intimately connected to Căpuțan's life trajectory: his father, a landless peasant, was employed by UDR for 37 years; had 7 children and brought the young Căpuțan to the steelworks in 1935, shortly after UDR pushed up the production of steel following the slump triggered by the Great Depression; it took him 5 years to enter the ranks of the skilled workers, just about the time the plant came under German control; himself a father of 3, Căpuțan was the typical commuter, residing in a village 38 kilometers away from Reșița, a distance he would travel daily by way of a truck provided by the company. It is these numbers, rather than simply the obsession with quantifying wasted steel that explain why a worker like Căpuțan was chosen to author a brochure on the discourse of productivity: his biography appealed to the many, including the many future commuters looking to enter industrial life, climb the skill ladder, provide for numerous families while retaining a foot in the village.

Along the chain of command, in-between Sepi and Căpuțan – the chief engineer and the leading smelter – stood Matei Stubnya – the master foreman – a genuine fountain of practical knowledge on the shopfloor and a distinguished author within the discourse of productivity. Much like the first two, Stubnya was also a communist party member, one highly active in party meetings. Unlike the first two, however, Stubnya's name never benefited from the wide reach of the brochure; his authorship remained local, deeply entrenched in the craft tradition of the steel mill, and popularized exclusively through the regional newspaper *Flamura Roșie*. Stubnya's biography would hardly appeal to anyone beyond the outskirts of Reșița: coming from a skilled urban working-class family of Czech descent, the young Matei spent years learning the craft under famed foreman Mayer, including the bossy manners and paternal tone of the shopfloor master, always calling subordinate workers "children". Away from the shopfloor, Stubnya was the master of the house: "large rooms, a kitchen, a porch and a bath. Modern furniture. Books on the shelves: Heine, Sadoveanu, Goethe ... Gherda, his playful daughter, just finished high school."¹³ For party activists, as well as for the general manager of the steel mill, Stubnya was already "a new type of worker", one who did not limit himself to making steel, but went on to make new workers "often sharing through the press the advanced work methods (*metode înaintate*) he had acquired during the three months that he spent amidst Soviet steelworkers."¹⁴ How could Reșița's quintessential

¹³ Toma George Maiorescu, *Geneze la borna stelară* (Reșița: Editura TIM, 2013), 228.

¹⁴ "Oameni și fapte din Reșița de azi", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 623, October 30 1955. It is not clear when Stubnya traveled to the Soviet Union. According to general manager Munteanu, already in

type of craft master also be the new communist worker, and a Stakhanovite no less?

Stubnya's mastery of the labor process could be doubly praised: on the one hand, the master foreman could be seen to promote Soviet work methods, including Stakhanovism, which in and of themselves allegedly increased productivity; on the other hand, Stubnya's skillset was indispensable for patching up the fissures and overcoming the innumerable obstacles that occurred on the shopfloor, from work stoppages due to lack of raw material and electricity to the need of onsite repairing of the blast furnace. Thus, Stubnya lectured side by side with engineer Sepi on the prospect of better organizing workteams¹⁵; he authored an article explaining how the life cycle of a blast furnace could be enhanced without much investments apart from quality bricks;¹⁶ or, finally, Stubnya suggested ingenious ways of obtaining scrap iron when supply was low, notably by having all the unused horseshoes around Reșița collected and sent to the steelworks.¹⁷ This was treasured advice, even when backed by less tolerable attitudes. Stubnya was occasionally chided for locking himself in his office, disregarding the work of supervision; for tolerating abuses on the shopfloor, purposefully bending pay schemes or for invoking "objective difficulties" when production quotas were not met. This eigensinnig behavior could trigger the wrath of the general manager who saw nothing but "carelessness" when engineers placed responsibility on the foremen, and the foremen placed it firmly farther down on the shoulders of smelters. The chain of command linking Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan was undergirded by a network of reciprocities that could at one and the same time boost or hinder productivity.¹⁸

1952 Stubnya was "educated by the party to learn from the Soviet experience"; Mihai Munteanu, "Sovromurile – un ajutor prețios în opera de construire a socialismului", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 287, July 30 1952.

15 "La Oțelărie", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 130, January 9 1951.

16 Matei Stubnya, "Cum putem prelungi durabilitatea vetrei și bolții cuptorului Siemens-Martin", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 440, January 23 1954. Căpuțan repeated some of Stubnya's opinions in an interview published several years after; "Să prelungim viața cuptoarelor", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 779, April 24 1957. Căpuțan was a "relentless researcher, passionate about solving the secrets that help him in the work of maintenance of industrial equipment."

17 "Ce spun oțelarii despre aprovizionarea cu fier vechi", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 897, June 14 1957.

18 This network of reciprocities rooted in shopfloor routines, manliness, skill, seniority, intra-class solidarity and inter-class deference and hostility is what defines the notion of "workers' control"; see David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America. Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11–12. More on this below.

That these three men became authors of the discourse of productivity was not by chance since each, in his own way, represented the ideal agent of rationalization of the labor process as envisaged by the emerging socialist regime. That each became an author of the discourse of productivity was a confirmation of their double determination as subjects of a specific industrial project and objects of the dynamic of capital accumulation of the First Five Year Plan. The productivity discourse, then, functioned in two complementary ways: as a general framework for guiding industrial production and as a language of (self)identification for the vast mass of industrial employees. The interplay between the two – particularly as it concerned issues touching on the wage system and workers' control over the labor process – defined the overall experience of building socialism for the likes of Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan.

This last chapter aims to explore the basic coordinates of this experience in order to shed fresh light on the twin processes of rationalization and austerity that underpinned what John Montias called Romania's "unbalanced growth" during the 1950s.¹⁹ Montias identified two growth policies pursued by the communist government during the 1950s. The first, extending to late 1953, was defined by massive exports of raw materials (notably oil, cement, lumber and foodstuff) that together with a loan contracted from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia paid for the acquisition of industrial equipment. The second, covering the middle of the decade up until 1958/9, saw exports of raw material and the purchase of machinery dwindle, followed by a shift towards exporting semifabricates and importing raw materials needed for the domestic manufacturing industry to run at full capacity (ore, coal, coke and steel). Both policies were predicated on the sacrifice of the consumer or what Montias called "austerity": comprehensive rationing was only disbanded in December 1954; investments in infrastructure, housing and services were minimal while the wage system inaugurated in 1949 produced a vast mass of precarious workers barely surviving on low wages.

By freeing foodstuff and raw materials for export, austerity allowed the government to import capital goods and push for the reconstruction, modernization and diversification of domestic industrial production.²⁰ On the one hand, the impossibility of keeping a steady inflow of technological upgrading had men like Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan mining for productivity gains in the fuller utilization of existing industrial equipment and machinery, factory redesign, work methods

¹⁹ John Michael Montias, "Unbalanced Growth in Rumania", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1963, 562–571.

²⁰ John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 15–71.

and supply chains. On the other hand, austerity blocked attempts to buy productivity gains with higher wages, whereby an expanded national market in consumer goods could compensate for increased managerial control of the labor process. Following Montias, this chapter argues that the 1950s in Romania was hardly a decade of “forced industrialization” as contemporary historians still argue, but should rather be viewed as one during which rationalization and austerity structured both the options available to policy makers and the experience of industrial work.²¹

In what follows I offer a contextual reading of the productivity discourse as it was articulated in both scholarly journals and the popular press. Understanding how its basic concepts operated is crucial for at least two reasons: firstly, because these texts sketched the horizon of interpretation – apologetic and critical – of socialist industrial life; secondly, because the same texts framed the way in which reports of industrial activity were construed. If questions of “bottlenecks” (*strangulări*), for instance, were singled out as “problems” to be solved through rationalization, it was only from the standpoint of an ideal production process that knew no delay or shortage. I then examine the transformations of the wage system as it underwent successive rationalization attempts. By 1956, the goal of rewarding the intensification of work through extensive payment-by-result and performance bonuses ended up polarizing the workers into those benefitting from bargains with lower management over norm breaking and higher wages and those excluded from informal shopfloor solidarities and left eking out a living on the base salary. Finally, I assess the impact of the major wage reform undertaken by the communist government in 1957. By slightly increasing workers’ purchasing power, particularly among the lower income tier, this reform questioned in many ways the austerity of the 1950s and the political economy of exporting raw materials.

5.2 Inner Reserves

It might be instructive to begin the analysis of the productivity discourse of the 1950s with a text that contributed significantly to its scholarly codification and represented its most coherent textual product: Biji’s and Trebici’s sociological

²¹ The notion of “forced industrialization” still makes an appearance in Bogdan Murescu’s recent synthesis of economic history; see *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice* (1500 – 2010), (Iași: Polirom, 2010), p. 336. However, the author does seem to suggest “forced industrialization” applies more to the 1970s rather than the 1950s.

factory monograph Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia. When the book first came out in 1957, it was widely praised for its accessible language, which could appeal to economists, managers, engineers “and in general to all those who find themselves in a position to lead a factory, a section or a workshop.”²² The book’s accessible style did not require any sacrifice in the handling and presentation of its main data: based on extensive research in company’s records, the book is full of graphs, statistics, diagrams and charts, with a more narrative section outlining the social history of the factory as it was transformed from an “anarchic” bundle of timber, metal and armament producing workshops before 1948 to a specialized manufacturer of injection pumps after 1953. The first such manufacturer in Romania, IC-Frimu factory (ICF) embodied a success story of the First Five Year Plan (1951–1955): through rationalization, standardization and investments in technological upgrading, the construction of tractors and buses could now rely on a domestic supplier. Import substitution, however, was only part of the story Biji and Trebici were telling; equally important was the question of labor productivity.

Here, already, the book slightly departed from the conventional wisdom of the age by arguing that the decisive role in boosting productivity should be assigned to the introduction of new machinery as well as “its adaptation to the conditions of specialized production” rather than to labor alone. After a brief period of factory redesign (1949–1952), when the bulk of investments went into the reconstruction of buildings, power supplies and access roads, ICF received massive capital input between 1953 and 1956 when new assembly lines (*linii de fabricație*) were brought in. This latter phase coincided with the specialization of production whereby the panoply of goods previously produced, one ranging from various spare parts for the emerging tractor and truck manufacturers to gearboxes and carburetors was dropped in favor of the now “mass produced” injection pumps. To be sure, the authors added that the organization of work was as important in boosting productivity as technology, and went on to describe how work methods evolved over the course of the early 1950s. The argument about technology, however, could hardly be extended to other industries where, due to the lack of such production profile changing investments, workers’ higher output was to be achieved almost exclusively based on existing equipment.

If from the standpoint of capital, ICF’s trajectory was rather exceptional within the context of Romanian industry during the early 1950s, from the standpoint of its workers, it was anything but unique. Accordingly, Biji and Trebici

22 *Flamura Roșie*, No. 922, September 10 1957.

spent a good deal of energy suggesting ways of rationalizing the labor process. Firstly, the two authors noted that ICF still hired a proportionally higher number of functionaries and auxiliary workers than was required, which unjustifiably increased production costs. While, given the technological development of the factory, more engineers were indeed needed, this was not the case for office employees and for those workers charged with undertaking maintenance work. This argument was grounded in the distinction between productive and unproductive employees, with the rationalization implying the reduction of the latter at the expense of the former. Secondly, Biji and Trebici went on to diagnose the case of labor turnover, which allegedly rose from a mere 5% in 1950 to over 20% in 1956, causing some labor shortages along the assembly line. The origins of this phenomenon were located in the combined effects of a lack of investment in housing and a haphazard employment policy targeting the young and the restless. Therefore, although the total number of employees increased by roughly 40% during the First Five Year Plan, management was still forced to rely on a so-called “nucleus” of traditional workers and engineers, many of whom had been with the company for over 10 years. Required to commute over long distances, the others came and went “out of their own will” (*din proprie inițiativă*).

The distinction between productive and unproductive employees and the question of labor turnover were not the only conceptual categories through which the labor process could be approached. Unlike the popular press or the party meeting, Biji and Trebici had little to say about discipline or its lack thereof on the shop floor, nor were they ethnographically much interested in questions of absenteeism, workers faking medical papers, brawls and the like. It was more important for the authors to underline that tired workers are inefficient and to suggest that rather than paying for their monthly train tickets, management would do well to build them houses near the factory. The total cost of transportation for the entire year for 25% of the workforce, Biji and Trebici argued, would finance around 20 new apartments. And then there were work methods and skill acquisition, both of which represented “practically unlimited resources” for pushing up output: “bettering the use of current technology is of utmost importance because it saves the state from additional investments while at the same time raising output with the same machinery.”²³ Granted, the two authors did note that a three shift workday was impossible to implement due to poor lighting during night time, but apart from this impediment, labor and its organization was a resource for economic growth that knew no end. The book ended on a cautionary note, reminding managers, planners and workers that the goal of a

23 M. Biji and V. Trebici, *Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1958), 170.

socialist factory was above all efficiency (rentabilitate), which had to be understood as the relationship between profit (beneficiu) and production costs (preț de cost).

Such reminders were customary in the epoch. Calls directed to the managerial staff to raise awareness of the necessity of observing the rules of profit were themselves part of rationalization. An example is engineer Dordea chiding Malaxa Works' workshop overseers for ignoring "the analysis of economic efficiency of the manufactured goods, being content to pass on this important task to the workshop economic group (the economist, the accountant, and the planner)."²⁴ The overseers' lack of responsibility, according to Dordea, translated into the lack of efficiency of the whole plant as the allocated wage fund (*fondul de salarii*) was not only distributed with total disregard to economic performance, but it was also overstretched, thus causing production costs to go up.²⁵ The emphasis on cutting production costs through various operations of rationalization – in this case enhanced supervision of the accounting books – was a staple of the productivity discourse of the 1950s, resting on the shared belief among economic experts and the leaders of the communist party that Romanian labor was still too expensive. How, then, are we to evaluate this first effort of the postwar Romanian social sciences to propose a "Marxist factory monograph" and systematize a basic set of concepts through which industrial activity could be grasped, acted upon and transformed?

First, it should be noted that apart from its less than common object of study – i.e. a medium-sized successful Fordist enterprise employing around 1,200 workers in a mountainous region 120 kilometers north of Bucharest – the main lines of analysis do not differ much from the regular factory reports assembled by communist party officials and ministerial authorities for the better half of the 1950s. The distinction between productive and unproductive employees, for instance, was seminal for efforts to reduce (*ieftinire*) production costs.²⁶ When a ministerial delegation visited the steel mill in Hunedoara in February 1953, its members were flabbergasted by the decision of the plant's management to double the so-called "coordination" personnel (technicians, engineers, ac-

²⁴ Nicolae Dordea, "Mai multă preocupare pentru îndeplinirea sarcinilor economice", *Viața Uzinei*, No. 436, October 11 1958.

²⁵ This understanding of industrial efficiency invites comparison with product-cost measurements implemented in Carnegie's fin-de-siècle steel mill empire as discussed by Jonathan Levy, "Accounting for Profit and the History of Capital", *Critical Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2014, 184–188.

²⁶ Petre Andrei, "Cu privire la simplificarea și ieftinirea aparatului administrativ în întreprinderi", *Lupta de clasă*, No. 12, December, 1956, 108–110.

countants, secretaries, overseers etc.) in the course of one year, thus going against governmental decree 1478/1951 which prescribed the exact opposite.²⁷ What was shocking here for the ministerial team of investigators was not so much the fact that the management did not observe the law, but rather that it could not understand the basic thrust of the productivity discourse which was supposed to guide industrial activity. Rather than cutting down production costs by reducing the number of “coordination” personnel, the management of the steel mill opted to increase supervision and even raise their wages from an average of 594 lei in 1952 to almost 900 lei in 1953.²⁸ It is very likely that the management felt the need not only to reconquer the labor process through the employment of a significantly larger number of overseers, but also to improve the coordination between various sections of the steel mill, particularly those in charge with supply, chasing down raw materials across the country, or those entrusted to manage the increasingly complex operations of maneuvering within and around the plan, chasing down production quotas and working norms.

Such situations revealed the contradictory nature of the productivity discourse as well as the contradictions likely to be experienced by management during the First Five Year Plan. What seemed superfluous, “unproductive” workers to the planning authorities in Bucharest, were in fact crucial employees desperately needed by management in its effort to better organize production and boost productivity. Second, the relationship between the productivity discourse of the 1950s and industrial activity, *y compris* managerial practice and the labor process, was prefigurative rather than reflective.²⁹ This gives Biji’s and Trebici’s study its allure of criticism. Indeed, read outside of its immediate context, *Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia* might be taken as an empiricist denunciation of the socialist economy in the making, couched in statistics rather than in the idiom of Marxism. Here, too, the book merely codified what, by the time of its publication, was already common practice.

27 ANR, PCM, 241/1953, pp. 2–4. The report noted in 1953 the number of workers went up by 15% compared to 1952, while that of “coordination” personnel increased by a whopping 94%, from 1744 in 1952 to 3391 in 1953.

28 In his famous study of the global spread of Taylorism during the first half of the twentieth century, French sociologist Georges Friedmann noted that in those national contexts in which labor productivity would be more an outcome of higher employment figures rather than technological upgrading, factories would be in need of highly trained “cadres de direction et surveillance”, see *Le travail en miettes. Spécialisation et loisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 17 et passim.

29 Bluntly put, the prefigurative function of discourse is to “change the self-identification and behavior of those addressed”, Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

Take, for instance, the so-called phenomenon of “storming” (*munca în asalt*): due to the lack of raw materials, managers would often “make up” for idleness during a short period of time, typically at the end of the month, when workers were required to do overtime and get things done. From the standpoint of the productivity discourse, the problem with “storming” was that it pushed up production costs and damaged machinery in the longer run. Putting in extra hours at the end of the month significantly increased workers’ wages, wasted more material and required a surge in physical effort that resulted in beginning-of-the-month spurts of absenteeism. Moreover, “storming” overused machinery causing it to break down easier or put out commodities of much lower quality. No governmental decree, such as the one passed in March 1952, had any impact on this industrial practice: the productivity discourse, therefore, continued to criticize suppliers (*furnizori*) for delaying deliveries and factory managers for evading responsibility in securing raw materials. Press articles, as the one authored by Stubnya, calling for the need to use any kind of scrap material laying around spread responsibility down the chain of command to the shopfloor. The hope was to accustom employees with the duty of “rhythmically fulfilling” (*îndeplinirea ritmică*) production plans, a way of underlining “storming” was a temporary and circumscribed pathology in the otherwise normal run of industrial activity.³⁰

Third, Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia provided some scientific credentials to the pivotal notion of “inner reserves”. As we have seen in the case of engineer Sepi, the notion was already in use as early as 1952, and perhaps even earlier. Yet it was only after the communist party plenum convened in late August 1953 that “inner reserves” took off as a key component of the productivity discourse and the primary guide for rationalization at the factory level. In principle, the plenum was supposed to mark a turning point in the industrial strategy of the party, now willing to pay more attention to the development of agriculture, the light industry and the consumer goods manufacturers. In fact, the plenum merely stated the obvious, namely that the Romanian state was unable to finance the growth of the steel and manufacturing industries at a reasonably stable pace.³¹ The lack

30 Carol Loncear, “Pentru îndeplinirea ritmică a programului de producție în industria metalurgică”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 5–6, May-June, 1953, 72–78. Loncear’s analysis of “storming” is similar to the one proposed for postwar Hungary, arguably from within the same discourse of productivity, by János Kornai, *Overcentralization in Economic Administration. A Critical Analysis based on Experience in Hungarian Light Industry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 132–138.

31 One economic expert summed up the plenum as follows: “from now on, the development of our heavy industry will not be achieved through investments but rather through the discovery

of investments for expanding industrial infrastructure had to be acknowledged by managers as well: as one economic expert put it, the plenum “energetically struggled against the unhealthy tendency exhibited by party cadres and state functionaries who do not make extensive use of the factories’ inner reserves and ask instead for the state to make investments for the construction of new factories in order to boost output.”³² Workers and engineers were called upon to understand that their duty is first and foremost “to raise output by way of using inner reserves” and only later by way of “the construction of new sections or factories.”³³ The emphasis on “inner reserves” after August 1953, then, would allow “for an increase of labor productivity without an increase of fixed and circulating assets (mijloace fixe și circulante) or of the number of employees, which would finally reduce the cost of production.”³⁴

The notion of “inner reserves” helped articulate a strategy of growth without investments, whereby increased output and higher labor productivity were to be achieved using existing machinery through rationalization, rather than by way of technological upgrading or the expansion of “fixed and circulating assets”. In this context, rationalization was understood as a complex set of managerial practices, work methods, incentive schemes and organizational devices geared towards boosting efficiency and, implicitly, reducing production costs. As Simion Zeigher – boss of the State Committee for Work and Wages – defined the process: “in order to discover reserves we need to thoroughly analyze each component that goes into production costs: raw materials, fuel, energy, wages and amortization. Equally, we have to study ways of cutting back on useless spending, as well as on spending on administrative work.”³⁵ For instance, workers submitting proposals to management for reusing scrap material were part of the process³⁶; and so too was the campaign orchestrated by communist party activists against doc-

and intensive use of factories’ inner reserves.”, L. Radu, “Mobilizarea rezervelor interne în uzinele siderurgice”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 1, January, 1954, 27.

32 L. Marcovici, “Mobilizarea resurselor interne ale întreprinderilor”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 6, June, 1954, 148.

33 IBIDEM. Marcovici was critically reviewing a booklet published by Carol Loncear, *Mobilizarea resurselor interne ale întreprinderilor* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură politică, 1954).

34 IBIDEM.

35 Simion Zeigher, “Să mobilizăm rezervele pentru reducerea prețului de cost în industrie”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 10, October, 1954, 26.

36 For more on this practice in the GDR see Thilo Schimmel, “Shopfloor Politics under Socialism: Worker Identity, Rationalization, and Company Culture in (East) Germany, 1920–1996), (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), 5–7. Schimmel describes the practice as follows: “a tool to convince workers that they were participants in a socialist workplace democracy but also [...] a cheap tool to increase productivity without investments.”

tors giving away medical leave to supposedly ill workers. It was in the nature of “inner reserves” to be endless, easily observable and omnipresent. In many ways, every employee could enroll on the journey to discover them: the unskilled ambitious youth, the skilled peasant worker, the master foreman, engineers, technicians, planners, accountants, norm-setters (*normatori*), and management.

In Reșița, it was told of a locksmith aged 72 who significantly increased the use of his lathe: “long past the pension age, the old man (*moșul*) does not want to stay home, he wants to be among workers.”³⁷ Two years later, it fell on a group of Stakhanovite workers to forward an open letter to management noting there were still “inner reserves laying around” and asking for approval to perform at two machines at once in order to put them to better use.³⁸ Meanwhile at Malaxa Works in Bucharest, many workers were wasting precious reserves by strolling, chatting, and procrastinating.³⁹ Efforts to ferret out reserves during the second and third shift, when workers simply refused to commit, came in late and went home early, were equally unsuccessful.⁴⁰ To be sure, here too, much like in Reșița, positive examples abounded. In 1957, some workers took the duty to uncover “inner reserves” so seriously, applying to the letter a technical procedure handed down by the engineers, that they ended up producing more waste than finished goods. In this context, waste (*rebuturi*) was itself transformed into an “inner reserve” to be rationalized, catalogued and subjected to operations meant to save it for reuse. This process was not necessarily as efficient as it was imperative: faulty goods had to be injected back into consumption otherwise the losses incurred by the factory would skyrocket. Granted, one of the engineers at Malaxa Works did note with some concern that “during those thousands of hours spent for repairing what others broke, we could have built many more motors.”⁴¹

The concern with wasted time on the shopfloor was one of the premises that informed a major time and motion study conducted in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. In 1955, two researchers associated with the Faculty of Law and Economics of the Bolyai University descended upon a local metal factory in order to scientifically uncover “inner reserves” (what they called less metaphorically “the latent reserves of production”) hidden deep in the workday and, implicitly, in the manner in which work was organized. In so doing, the researchers appealed to participant observation, “photographing” as they put it, an entire work shift

37 “A îmbunătățit gradul de utilizare al mașinii sale”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 123, January 16 1951.

38 *Flamura Roșie*, No. 430, December 16 1953.

39 “Plimbăreții din uzinele noastră”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 216, July 17 1954.

40 “Și disciplina are un cuvânt de spus”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 374, August 3 1957.

41 Marcu Ioniță, “Rebuturi recuperabile?!”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 399, January 25 1958.

and closely observing individual workers. Moreover, since this method could only yield partial results, they also asked for a sample of workers to “photograph” themselves, jotting down on a special form, the rhythm, speed and pace of their work, as well as the time units required to accomplish certain tasks. This double “photographing” (*fotografiere*) was intended to closely monitor, analyze and propose solutions for boosting the efficiency of the factory.

The outcome of the study was rather predictable, with the researchers noting that workers waste too much time due to contradictory and often conflicting requests: “It often happens that the workers do not know what they are supposed to do at the beginning of the shift or it happens that the tasks assigned to one worker are changed multiple times during the workday. Therefore, the worker is forced to switch between the tasks handed to him by the workplace supervisor, which often goes against the recommendation of the foreman.”⁴² Locksmith Aladar Katz, for instance, lost around 150 minutes of his 8-hour workday adjusting his lathe to perform various operations while many of his peers roamed around the factory looking for raw materials and tools, losing on average 90 minutes per day. Because the piece-rate system rewarded quantity over quality, foremen had no incentive to check the state of the products manufactured, delegating the procedure to subordinate workers and adding precious minutes to their lost time. Finally, workers lost time during lunchtime, queuing for a hot meal at the canteen, and at the end of the workday, leaving earlier to avoid queuing for hot water at the showers. It was neither the use of the stopwatch nor the effort to time bodily rhythms at work – both of which were practices widely used to rationalize the postwar shopfloor in Western as well as in Eastern Europe – that was remarkable about Kecskès and Kerekes’s study but rather the tone of the investigation. Much like Biji and Trebici, the Bolyai researchers abstained from discussing the labor process in terms of workers’ lack of discipline and instead put the blame on management, accusing it of neglecting the logistics of supply. This type of analysis, however important for the productivity discourse of the 1950s, was exceptional, most likely because it required resources and highly trained personnel. It was also of limited use. In refraining from blaming workers, this type of analysis deprived the party activists of the daily tasks that were their bread and butter.

The great bulk of the productivity discourse, therefore, was produced through more artisanal means by activists of the communist party, local journalists, voluntary correspondents and trade-union bosses. Their medium of expres-

⁴² I., Kecskès, E. Kerekes, “O metodă de descoperire a rezervelor interne ale timpului de lucru în întreprinderile industriale”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 3, March, 1955, 63.

sion was neither the brochure nor the scholarly journal, but the factory newspaper; their weapon of choice the caricature and the moralizing column. To be sure, few of them had an easy life as they were constantly harassed by the very subjects about whom they wrote: denied access to the shopfloor, their mail opened and destroyed, their name the subject of dirty jokes.⁴³ By shaming the lazy, mocking the absentees, ridiculing the unruly youth, praising the diligent and promoting the exceptional, the factory newspaper was the main material support of the productivity discourse. The duality inscribed in the productivity discourse of the 1950s – partly through elaborate analysis of the labor process, and partly through disciplinarian portrayals of factory life – reflected the dual nature of the worker as he/she was increasingly subsumed under the drive of rationalization.

On the one hand, workers appeared as use-values for capital, pure labor-power to be bought, quantified, shifted around, paid and expended in production. On the other hand, the same workers appeared as embodied labor-power, carnal subjects weaving solidarities, spawning animosities and making the most of their state of subjection at the point of production. These two sides of the productivity discourse were not merely complementary; they were mutually constitutive. The innumerable caricatures depicting slackers in the daily press of the time made little sense outside of the socialist obsession with a rhythmic, uninterrupted, round-the-clock labor process. To take these representations as evidence of culturally or politically mediated workers' resistance would be misleading. Rather, the type of obstinacy to industrial drill that we glimpse in caricatures, read about in newspapers or stumble upon in the archived minutes of a trade-union meeting was immanent to rationalization, a mere fact of factory life.⁴⁴ The slacker was neither "backward" as communist party activists would infer, nor engaged in "passive resistance" as exiled social-democrats were claiming.⁴⁵ The slacker was the natural by-product of speed-ups, piece-work and all the other methods geared towards labor intensification against the background of broken chains of supply, "storming" and "bottlenecks". The fact that the effort

43 "Să fie sancționați sugrumatorii criticii corespondenților muncitori", *Munca*, No. 1687, March 14 1953. This was one of the many articles published during the 1950s by the main trade-union weekly *Munca* calling for those that harassed its correspondents to be sanctioned. It named factory managers, foremen, engineers and even ordinary workers. See also A. Lucaci, M. Alexe "Mai multă atenție criticii de jos", *Lupta de clasă*, No. 9, September, 1956, 86–91.

44 I here follow Chakrabarty's ruminations on the Marxian notion of "the despotism of capital" in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 58–59.

45 On the notion of "passive resistance" as formulated by exiled social-democrats, see *România Muncitoare*, No. 17, May 1953; No. 34, October 1954; No. 48, December 1955; and finally No. 64, April, 1957. The latter issue takes on the wage reform of 1957.

to mine for “inner reserves” through rationalization was met with something of a “guerilla warfare” on the shop floor was hardly surprising.⁴⁶ What was surprising was the slow relocation of industrial conflict on the shop floor, now pertaining exclusively to issues of workers’ control rather than, as up to late 1948, to questions of provisioning. How did this mutation happen?

As I argued in the third chapter, rudiments of the productivity discourse were already visible in the way in which communist party bosses approached the food crisis in Reșița in 1947. When access to “white bread” was demanded by metalworkers as a token of a local tradition of preferential provisioning in the context of hyperinflation, communist newspapers reacted by arguing food should be conditioned on economic performance and by reminding workers that unlike before the war, in 1947 “time and motion experts with their stopwatch in their hands have disappeared. Time no longer matters for them.”⁴⁷ Since time did not matter to workers and management alike, the very notion of slacking could hardly be employed as a critical term for discussing the labor process or for framing the contours of shop floor conflict. In order for time to become an “inner reserve” in need of rationalization, a whole array of social and political transformations rooted in and around the industrial workplace had to take place. Firstly, the practice of collective bargaining embedded in the collective labor contracts was terminated after 1948 when the contracts were rewritten following the Soviet model. As shown in the fourth chapter, the new contracts were premised on a productivity bargain whereby, depending on the performance of their factories, workers would in principle freely benefit from all sorts of privileges: paid vacations, daycare facilities, medical care, canteen meals, subsidized accommodation etc. This shift in the nature of the contracts recalibrated the nature of bargaining itself, marking a transition from representation via “men of trust” and trade-union delegates to the internecine struggles between various representatives of the communist party over social investments at the factory level. The new objects of gendered contention were now the director’s fund or the social insurance budget rather than the jointly calculated standard of living. Secondly, the change in the structure of bargaining was accompanied by pacification i.e. the containment of industrial violence with its panoply of wildcat strikes, sequestrations and the physical attacks on managers and workers representatives.

⁴⁶ For the metaphor of “guerilla warfare” on the shopfloor, see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2006), chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Eric Wayand, “Umbre peste Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 725, February 17 1947, p. 2.

Beginning with 1948, managerial authority was no longer to be decided by workers' purging or molesting the manager or the engineer in evanescent moments of collective unrest, but rather through mundane rituals of suspicion and denunciation bent on testing the moral character and political rectitude of the supervisory body of the factory against party doctrine. Thirdly, for "time to matter", industrial wages (and cash money) had to be restored to their double status as incentives to perform on the shop floor and as the privileged medium for the acquisition of goods. For lack of a better term, I have dubbed this third process "monetarization": the protracted control of inflationary tendencies within the economy followed by the abolition of workers' debts, mass saving campaigns and the clearing of the wage relation of its subsidized components such as firewood or basic consumption items sold through the factory shops. It was this great postwar transformation that allowed for rationalization to take off and which socially grounded the productivity discourse, rendering it meaningful in the eyes of its audience.

By the time of the wage reform of 1949, time started to matter again, together with skill, hierarchy, authority and cash money. Characteristically, the semantics of "backwardness" for communist party bosses altered as well: whereas for most of the immediate postwar, the "backward" worker was the one who went on strike, rebelled against party discipline and militated for the collective labor contracts to be observed by management, during the 1950s, the same "backward" worker was the one who rebelled against industrial discipline by coming in late, faking illnesses in order to obtain medical leave, strolling around the shop floor, chatting with and even bullying workmates, and leaving early. Gone was the talk of "anarcho-syndicalism", of "fascism" and the "fear of the masses" for during the 1950s one of the gravest offenses was the one committed by comrade Veiconi – a steelworker in Reșița – who worked whenever he so fancied (*când are poftă*), breaking the norm one day, not fulfilling it at all the next.⁴⁸ In this context, mastering one's bodily rhythms and pace of work on the shop floor, either together in work teams or individually at one's workbench, was one form of control workers' could aspire to preserve over the labor process and potentially turn into their own "inner reserve" for boosting their wages, lengthening their free time, and buffering the pressure of rationalization.

48 "Disciplina în muncă – veriga principală în sporirea productivității muncii", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 736, November 24 1956.

5.3 Wages of Growth

We once again begin, as we have done on a number of occasions in this book, with an exceptional archival document that might be taken to reveal, as Grendi famously put it, the normal state of things, a state of things so “normal that it usually remains silent.”⁴⁹ And this time we start at the end of the decade, in 1961, rather than at the beginning of the 1950s, in an effort to work our way backwards in search of explanans for the following explanandum formulated by Malaxa Works employee, Lupu Ancelevici:

We receive one car in service for repairing, not one but three people work on it. I open up the motor, I carry it to the workbench, I wash it, I reassemble it, and the other guy gets the bonus because his name is Vasile and he is a cousin of the foreman. Comrade Lucian, comrade Marin Vasile, they are the foreman's men. Comrade Lucian always rides a motorbike into town during work time. Naturally, these hours are counted [i.e. as worktime]. He steals gas from the state and wastes working hours. The foreman is named Calcianu. If I tell this to the foreman, he says I don't work on the plan: ‘You are free to go wherever you want’ he says. It is true that I cannot work as before, say 15 or 16 years ago, but without me they cannot move a finger, I am there for every kind of repair work. I have been working for 34 years, my eyesight is not that good, and my strength cannot compare to the strength that I had, say 15 or 16 years ago, yet I work with all my power. I am in the factory early in the morning, and it often happens that I find the light turned on, or a motor running for nothing, and I care, I cannot just stay passive (nu pot să stau pasiv) because I earn my bread from this workplace. If I'd be indifferent as so many others are, what will then happen to us all.⁵⁰

And here is the follow-up to Lupu's remarks as articulated by his brother, Moise Ancelevici, himself an employee of the same factory:

I raise the question of gas. Those who have motorbikes take gas out of the factory. One worker manufactured spare parts for his bike in the factory. I cannot take him by his throat because I lose my bread. [...] There are still people who steal gas, tools etc. The problem of stealing has been dealt with some years ago. They made up fake papers and took out of the factory all sorts of things. Finally, they were caught and sent to jail for 6 years, but only after they caused great losses. I was once in the tram and I saw 2 workers carrying some wire taken from the factory. The other problem is the exams. If we demand promotion to a different wage category, they force us to take exams and they ask us theoretical questions which we cannot answer. Those who just came in the factory, they are immediately put into

49 “[...] tanto normale da risultare più spesso sottaciuta.”, Edoardo Grendi, “Ripensare la microstoria?”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 29, No. 86, 1994, 544. Or, in an earlier formulation, “il documento eccezionale può risultare eccezionalmente ‘normale’, appunto perché rivelante.”, *Edoardo Grendi*, “Micro-analisi e storia sociale”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1977, 512.

50 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 13

a higher wage category. We do not know theory, we know practice, we know how to work with the chisel, the hammer, the screwdriver.⁵¹

Let us now try to decipher the larger social context that made the Ancelovicis' discontent possible and pushed the two brothers to forward their written complaint to the office of the General Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party. We should first note, as Lupu himself admits, that the workers were past their prime, perhaps approaching retirement. Elderly workers were a common presence on Romanian shopfloors well into the 1960s, arguably until the first major pension reform of 1966. Low pensions and murky bureaucratic procedures made exiting employment difficult. Moreover, pension dossiers were also reviewed by the Ministry of Labor, whose office clerks were often accused of corruption, being castigated for giving away pensions with too much leniency.⁵² Difficult as it was to obtain, pensions were nevertheless sought after by workers who could no longer keep up with the demands of industrial work or those who came to earn too little to justify their toil. One report issued in 1960 argued that over 100,000 workers took their claims to court during the 1950s in an effort to have their length in service – the backbone of the pension system – recognized by the state.⁵³ In this context, it is reasonable to suppose Lupu's reference to his aging body, one that could not perform as "say 15 or 16 years ago" was made with this prospect in mind: the days that awaited him at the end of his working days were grim.

If the Ancelovici brothers opted to voice their discontent, this might have been because retiring was hardly an option. Yet 34 years of employment does not quite make for retirement age. What it does make for is skill and seniority, and perhaps a general sense of pride in one's standing on the shopfloor, among his workmates. Lupu Ancelovici's apparent brag about him doing all the work while the others promenade displayed such sensibilities, and so too did his apparent snide remark that it was the others rather than himself getting wage bonuses. Here, however, the situation was already more complex than Lupu's words make it sound. One ministerial investigation at Malaxa Works revealed wage bonuses were indeed given out on thin achievements and out of occasional "favoritism", but the general scheme of rewarding was unmistakably

⁵¹ IBIDEM, p. 16.

⁵² ANR, PCM, 177/1955, p. 47 et passim.

⁵³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 24/1960, pp. 4–6. Workers went to court because it was nearly impossible to reconstitute their length in service on the basis of factory archives, most of which had either been destroyed during the war or simply missing.

“egalitarian”: because bonuses were relatively meager and because foremen had the last say in allocating them, all workers received them in rotation in order to make all of them happy. One worker, for instance, was found carrying a notebook where he jotted down who among his colleagues got the bonus, so that he may know when his turn would come up.⁵⁴ Moreover, Ancelovici’s complaint about not being promoted to a higher wage category and being required to take “theory” exams is equally puzzling in view of the findings of the investigation. Ministerial officials detected the same “egalitarian” principle in this case as well, since out of 1,229 workers who took their reevaluation exams (*reîncadrări*) in 1960, only 51 failed, and even these, when asked, said it was only a matter of time until they climbed higher up the wage scale. How, then, should we assess the Ancelovici’s denunciation of the inequality and inequity encapsulated by the distribution of the wage bonuses and reevaluations?

One possible explanation is that both Lupu and Moise Ancelovici were left out of the network of shop floor solidarity that made the system “egalitarian” in the first place. Theirs was a condition of marginality vis-à-vis the regime of complicities that regulated how wage bonuses were handed out, a marginality that also revealed the extent to which failing exams was just an unlucky accident, not a tragedy. To be excluded from these networks of camaraderie and kin translated into quotidian conflicts with the foremen and framed the characteristic outsider’s view that everybody was a relative or a friend to everybody else, save for the outsider, and all of them were thieves of sorts.⁵⁵ Lupu Ancelovici even sensed an air of anti-Semitism feeding his troubled relation with foreman Wolf Cassian: “He brings me to the brink of shouting: ‘I am Jewish, you are German, why do you pick on me?’ [...] Comrade, let us both cut our fingers and let’s see, isn’t your blood as red as mine?”⁵⁶

Lupu’s and Wolf’s blood might have been equally red, but this was arguably the only thing they had in common. It was rare for senior and skilled workers such as the Ancelovici brothers to be excluded from the set of relations of mutual dependence, inevitable conflict and necessary cooperation that informed workers’ solidarities on the shopfloor. For much of the 1950s, it was the young, seldom skilled, rarely disciplined, tardiest worker who was pushed to the margins

54 Not by accident, the report following this investigation at Malaxa Works is deposited in the same archival dossier enclosing Ancelovici’s complaint; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 9.

55 The classical outsider’s view of the state socialist shopfloor is Miklós Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker’s State* (New York: Universe Books, 1978), notably 143–146 for the relationship between work competition, friendship and the making of the so-called “homers”.

56 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 15.



Image 11: Youth brigade, Bucharest, 1950; Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 180/1950

of the shopfloor, mocked, abused or simply ignored.⁵⁷ The Stakhanovist movement, for instance, intending to mobilize the young by giving them a chance to burn the stages of apprenticeship, was characteristically hijacked by work team bosses, the senior and skilled and the foremen. An entire issue of *Viața Sindicală* – the trade-union newspaper – sought to uncover forms of “familialism” (*familialism*) in the way the title of Stakhanovite was granted, an old catchword used by communist activists to describe ties of solidarity between workers and lower management.⁵⁸ To be sure, denunciations of “old-fashioned” foremen were equally common. Such was the case with Malaxa Works’ employee, comrade Marinescu who “distributes good work only to the few old craftsmen (*meseriași vechi*) knowing they will get things done without further clarifications from the foreman”.⁵⁹ For the young workers, however, comrade Marinescu dis-

57 The best literary description of this phenomenon is Nicolae Breban’s novel *Francisca* (1965). Drawing on his short stint as a worker at Malaxa Works during the early 1950s, Breban presents the trials and tribulations of a relatively young, unskilled worker of peasant stock who, under the paternal eye of a communist party boss, tries to move up to the rank of skilled metalworker, an effort which required him to overcome family pressure, social stigma, obtrusive horseplay and humiliation at the hands of his future workmates.

58 *Viața Sindicală*, No. 1630, January 8 1953.

59 “Maistru rămas în urma vremii”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 192, January 22 1954.

tributed “scrap” work (*ciurucuri*), had no “love” (*dragoste*), no good will (*bună voință*), assigned them to the worst machines, and generally paid them “under the counter” without official paychecks. Skilled workers, in turn, were criticized for keeping to themselves, unwilling to share the so-called “secret” of their craft with the young out of “egoism” and cultural prejudice towards the newly employed.⁶⁰ What, then, might account for the transformation of shop floor marginality from an industrial pathology affecting predominantly the young and unskilled for the better half of the 1950s, to one that also came to plague the elderly and skilled by the end of the decade? Or to put it differently, what explains the breakdown in the kind of shop floor solidarity forged between skilled workers and foremen for much of the 1950s, resulting in the kind of bad blood displayed between Lupu and Wolf?

Part of the answer lies with the radical wage reform of 1957. Decided upon in late December 1956 during a party plenum, this wage reform was explicitly designed to overturn the consequences of the wage system inaugurated in 1949, notably what Simion Zeigher – boss of the State Committee for Work and Wages – called the system’s “petty bourgeois egalitarian” aspects.⁶¹ Hidden behind this Stalinist metaphor stood deceptively simple reasoning: predicated on the extension of piece-rate and the fulfilment of norms, the old wage system produced shop floor alliances and forms of cooperation geared towards the manipulation of norms, wage categories and payment schemes. Moreover, in spite of Zeigher’s metaphor, the system was anything but “egalitarian”: inside factories, some workers thrived on “overblown norms” (*norme umflate*) making use of their networks of solidarity to amass sufficient raw material and get the better tools, while others barley eked out a living on the base salary alone. This polarization was reinforced by the control of the labor process that skilled workers could exercise and was spelled out, as we have seen above, as a conflict of generations segmented by morality, seniority, gender and social origin. For Zeigher, it was precisely this polarization and the solidarity that undergirded it that blocked the introduction of “technical-scientific norms”, excessively fragmented wage categories, perverted the allocation of wage bonuses and frustrated efforts to ferret out “inner reserves”.

That a “guerilla warfare” on the shop floor accompanied the drive for rationalization across state socialist East Central Europe during the 1950s is nothing new. Both Mark Pittaway for Hungary and Peter Hübner for GDR – the first in-

⁶⁰ “Secretul”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 302, March 20 1956.

⁶¹ Simion Zeigher, “Unele probleme ale îmbunătățirii sistemului de salarizare a muncitorilor în industrie”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 6, 1957, 18–32.

spired by the research tradition on workers' control, the latter drawing on Alf Lüdtkke's historical anthropology – showed in minute detail how workers not only resisted, but also appropriated various components that made up the “Stalinist revolution in production”: specific methods of labor intensification, work brigades, Stakhanovism, payment schemes, “storming” etc.⁶² This back-and-forth between party activists, industrial experts, trade union bosses and management on the one side and workers on the other was a form of everyday politics already in the Soviet Union. As Lewis Siegelbaum noted in his analysis of Stakhanovism:

The raising of labor productivity to a first-order priority – itself a response to ongoing socio-economic processes – evoked not only enthusiasm and resistance, as Soviet and Western historians respectively assert. Maneuvering and accommodation were at least as much present. These responses inflected Stakhanovism and may be said to have constituted the politics of productivity. If productivity is defined as output per fixed unit of working time, then the struggles over the means of raising output and the ways of deflecting or minimizing the burdens associated with this effort were its politics.⁶³

A number of historians argue that this type of “struggle over the means of raising output” played a stabilizing role in the running of the emerging socialist economies⁶⁴: workers' obstinately made the most of their worn tools and scarce raw materials while at the same time making the most of their condition for themselves. This, in turn, triggered antagonism and solidarity, both between management and workers and among workers themselves, with party and union bosses often buffering the two sides. Workers who, through the sheer power of their practical knowledge, could patch-up a rusty machine, invent a device for spinning it faster or propose ways of saving materials were particularly valued.

⁶² The clearest exposition of this line of argument is to be found in the work of Mark Pittaway, notably his early “The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948 – 1953”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1999. For Peter Hübner see his classic *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiss: Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR, 1945 – 1970* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).

⁶³ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935 – 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7.

⁶⁴ Most clearly for the case of GDR by Andrew I. Port, “East German Workers and the ‘Dark Side’ of Eigensinn. Divisive Shop-Floor Practices and the Failed Revolution of June 17, 1953”, in Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (eds.) *The East German Economy, 1945 – 2010. Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 111 – 130. See also Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945 – 1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) on the so-called “campaign economy” and workers' entrenched control of production.

Self-reliant work teams needing little additional supervision or instruction from foremen or engineers, though occasionally frowned upon by party activists for their autonomy and alleged disregard for “technological discipline”, were equally valued by management. Here is how the director of “Steagul Roșu”, a leading truck manufacturer located in the Transylvanian town of Brașov saw one of his best workers:

I personally allowed comrade Hofman twice to take out construction materials from the factory almost for free in order not to cause too much of a stir (*vălvă*). He did a lot of innovations for our factory. One day he came to me saying his mother fell ill and his wife and child live in the town of Deva, to which he always commutes. This citizen was helped because he wanted to quit us. I gave him one month of leave to settle his family affairs and come back to us. Then he said he is willing to come back but only if he has a house. When the house was ready, his family decided not to follow him and he sold his new house to the chief accountant. He went back to his town to take care of his ill mother. Then he got divorced, he took his child and came back to us, and he married again. This time I granted him another house.⁶⁵

If Hofman could bargain for two new houses and some free construction materials, many other skilled workers could easily get away with less: less supervision at the factory’s gates to take home various goods useful around the house, more material at the workbench to break norms and boost their wages, and enough overall control of the production schedule to squeeze in an hour for drinks with one’s peers during the workday. The sum total of these small gestures, underpinned by the indifference towards the young and unskilled, made up the senior workers’ control of the labor process, one grounded not merely in skill, camaraderie and cultural distinction, but also in the prevailing wage system that structured Romanian industry between 1949 and 1956. For the industrial experts that drafted the wage reform of 1957, it was obvious that rather than encouraging individualism, breeding competition and sapping shop floor solidarities all in the name of higher productivity, piece-rate payment schemes afforded workers more autonomy, better control over their work time and strengthened alliances between lower management (i.e. foremen) and skilled workers. This did not mean that keeping to one’s self, occasional strife and rivalry were absent from the shop floors or that these attitudes were inimical to more output; it simply

⁶⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 5/1957, pp. 7–8. For much of the 1950s factories could sell construction materials to their workers at market prices in order for them to build their own private houses. This policy was part of a larger effort of the Romanian state to support the so-called “stabilization” of workers, mostly through offering them cheap bank loans to finance the building of private houses.

meant that the wage system itself was liable to be appropriated by certain groups of workers for their own benefit and to the detriment of others. Or to put it differently, it was the structure of the wage system itself that produced both solidarity and conflict.

Some of the reports drafted before and during the wage reform of 1957 not only acknowledged the perverse effect of the wage system, but also proposed to overcome it with the goal of significantly reducing piece-work (*munca în acord*) across industries. The decision to cut back on piece-work was remarkable. Trumpeted by the communist party as early as March 1945 as the best way to approach postwar reconstruction, piece-work payment schemes were extended to virtually all industrial jobs save for office work in early 1949. Naturally, this process required some persuasion as well as a lot of convoluted arguments since piece-work was not only not new for Romanian industry, it was what interwar trade-unions had traditionally fought against as a “brutal form of exploitation.”⁶⁶ The enchantment with piece-work, a global phenomenon between roughly the end of the First World War and the 1960s, was shared equally between command and market economies, socialism and capitalism, liberalism, social-democracy, communism and fascism. Whereas under predominantly market-regulated national contexts, the various forms of piece-rate were considered “the most thoroughgoing means of applying straight market principles to wage determination”⁶⁷, under state socialism, piece-work acquired the allure of the fairest wage system available, one that would reward individual and group effort and incentivize workers to perform at higher standards. In addition, this particular wage system was seen as a universal solution to an entire array of postwar malaises: during the inflationary period that immediately followed the war, the wage system promised to keep workers’ earnings in check, not allowing them to accumulate stacks of cash money, push up demand and boost prices; during the First Five Year Plan (1951–1955) piece-work could place the burden of economic growth on the workers rather than on capital input by turning norm breaking into the primary motivation for increasing one’s income.

As I pointed out in the third chapter, although efforts to impose piece-rate marked the monetary stabilization of 1947, it was only at the beginning of 1949 that a comprehensive wage reform was passed. This reform introduced the distinction between tariff wage (*salariul tarifar*) and the total wage (*salariu total*), with the first set in accordance with the skill level of the worker, type of

⁶⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 39/1945, p. 3. See also “Munca în acord”, *Viața Sindicală*, No. 16, April 8 1945.

⁶⁷ Ronald Dore, *British Factory, Japanese Factory: The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 347.

industry, and complexity of tasks and the latter dependent on the worker fulfilling norms and earning bonuses. Typically, the tariff wage was kept extremely low even in industries considered to be of paramount importance for the national economy, in order to constrain workers from adding up their total wage to include norm breaking and bonuses, which in turn would have acted as an incentive to perform better.⁶⁸ Forms of piece-rate were distinguished from hourly rates of pay or time-rate (*munca în regie*), a system of payment reserved for management and office clerks. It was this entire wage system that came to be reformed in 1957 because, as one report put it, the tariff wage “lost its importance in workers’ earnings” and failed to secure “a stable and secure source of income”.⁶⁹

The fact that the tariff wage lost its importance for workers’ earnings was, of course, an exaggeration since low tariff wages were the backbone of the piece-rate system from 1949. What industrial experts found scandalous was that workers were able to manipulate it: because tariff wages were low, management would often turn a blind eye to norm breaking, letting workers over-fulfil their norms so that at least some of them could earn a decent pay. Those who did so were the skilled and the senior, workers who could secure for themselves a constant flow of raw materials, better tools and kinder words from the foreman. “Overblown norms” became the rallying cry for the reformers as they looked back at the trajectory of the first half of the 1950s. Examples of fake norms filled entire reports: in one factory north of Bucharest screwing in six light bulbs took six hours; in another factory in Transylvania workers were registered with a workday of 24 hours⁷⁰; in yet another, workers regularly broke their norms by an average of 400%.⁷¹ When peasants raised prices for their produce, foremen and factory managers “tolerated countless cases and even supported the practice of overblown norms” in order to allow workers to “artificially boost their wages” and compensate for the increased prices.⁷² In this context, norm setters (*normatori*) were boxed in from all sides: workers mocked their stopwatches while barring them access to the shopfloor, notably during end of the month “storming” sessions; managers appointed some of the least authoritative persons as norm

68 For how this system worked in the steel industry see Constantinescu Ștefan, “Un nou sistem de salarizare în siderurgice”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 357, April 4 1953.

69 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 139/1956, Vol. 1, p. 234.

70 This was the so-called “pencil method” (*din creion*); for the registration of non-existing work in the Soviet Union see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Masters of the Shop Floor: Foremen and Soviet Industrialization”, in Nick Lampert and Gábor T. Rittersporn (eds.) *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath. Essays in Honor of Moshe Lewin* (London: Palgrave, 1992), 141.

71 ANR, PCM, 441/1954, pp. 5–7.

72 IBIDEM, 4.

setters – the recently employed or even women – so as to avoid nagging conflicts with the workers; and finally party and trade-union bosses at the factory level conspired to preserve this stalemate by doing little to disturb the tacit agreement between workers and managers, an agreement which functioned as an informal, discretionary wage raise for privileged groups of workers.

By 1956, the tariff wage counted on average for under 50% of the take-home pay, a fact that made it nearly impossible to impose new work norms in search of higher labor productivity: even a slight tightening up of the norms was met with resistance on the part of the workers and even managers because it affected workers' earning by pulling wages down. In this context, the issue of workers' control over the implementation of norms was deemed a major obstacle for squeezing out "inner reserves", nothing but the burdensome legacy of an earlier wage system in need of rationalization.⁷³ This was hardly surprising. Just like the enchantment with piece-rate was a global phenomenon with very different justifications, so too was the disenchantment with it, though for very similar reasons. Brown's famous study of piece-work conducted at the British Glacier Metal Company in the early 1960s spoke the same language as industrial experts in socialist Romania: having also underscored the fact that piece-work chipped away at managerial authority and made supervision of the labor process difficult. Moreover, because workers enjoyed too much autonomy on the shop floor, the foremen had little control over the pace of work, the rhythm of production and work methods, not to mention the always complex and conflictual affair of "rate-fixing" i.e. determining the content of working norms scientifically rather than practically, the latter heavily relying on workers' input. Brown's plea for the abandonment of piece-rate in favor of hourly rates could have been voiced in Bucharest too, just like his suggestion to free management from dealing bonuses and allocating prizes mirrored reform proposals that reached the desk of Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej in 1957.⁷⁴

73 This was a suggestion already made in 1955, see M. Vasiliu, "De ce productivitatea muncii trebuie să crească mai repede decât salariul mediu?", *Lupta de clasă*, No. 10, October, 1955, 105–109.

74 Wilfred Brown, *Piecework Abandoned: The Effect of Wage Incentive on Managerial Authority* (London: Heinemann, 1962). While Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej agreed with the reform proposal presented to him, he also noted it was full of good intentions but missed the role of the "subjective element" (elementul subiectiv), by which he presumably meant the panoply of informal practices and shopfloor solidarities available to workers and managers; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 21/1958, p. 8. For Brown's failure to consider the "subjective element" in his analysis of the piece-work system at Glacier Metal Company see the review by John H. Goldthorpe in *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 73, No. 292, 1963, 747–750.

The reform, therefore, focused on four interrelated aspects. First, it increased the importance of the tariff wage in the total wage which went up to an average of 83.2% by December 1957.⁷⁵ This involved an overhauling of the whole wage system which was now effectively operating practically on hourly rather than piece rates. Second, it reevaluated working norms across industries, making it harder for workers to break them with more than 120%.⁷⁶ Third, it cut down skill categories (*rețele tarifare*) from an estimated 240 to around 20. What this amounted to was a drastic reduction in the number of types of crafts (*meserii*) available, the fragmentation of which over the previous decade was the outcome of the classical Taylorist obsession with breaking down job requirements into as many tasks as possible. Finally, the reform redefined the role of the foreman on the shopfloor, enhancing authority and supervisory powers.⁷⁷ The impact of the reform was felt immediately.

The reduction in the importance of norm-breaking for the take-home pay could not compensate for the new tighter norms, which meant that workers accustomed to fill in their wages through going above the norm came to earn less than before. Also, fewer skill categories momentarily stiffened factories' internal labor markets which had allowed workers to easily move up the wage scale. More importantly, however, the wage reform occasioned the realignment of shopfloor solidarities by making the input of the senior and the skilled less vital at the point of production. Experience, dexterity and practical knowledge were more important under the piece-rate schemes, particularly in the case of team work such as prevailed in metal industries, when norms had to be surpassed rather than under the hourly rate system when, as one industrial expert put it, "workers' income is more stable but the drawback is that when they don't make the plan they get more. Under the old system when they did not make the plan they got 500 lei, now they receive 800 lei."⁷⁸ Moreover, with the tariff wage at over 80% of the total wage, under the new wage system factories idled by the lack of raw material would have to spend more money on their equally idled workers.

We now begin to understand the Ancelovicis' discontent. After the wage reform of 1957, the brothers' craft mastery in the repair shops of Malaxa Works was no longer paying as much as it did under the piece-rate system. They might have still done their job conscientiously, taking motors apart and reassembling them

⁷⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 21/1958, p. 6.

⁷⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 39/1957, p. 10. Before the reform, norms were allegedly surpassed with an average of 200%.

⁷⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 62/1959.

⁷⁸ ANR, PCM, Stenogramă, 10/1957, p. 53.

all by themselves, but foremen like Calcianu and Cassian were no longer dependent on Lupu's and Moise's ability to do so singlehandedly and could afford to marginalize the skilled and the senior while at the same time promoting their own acquaintances. Perhaps their marginalization came couched in a language of anti-Semitism or failing bodily strength, but neither of these two factors were its cause. Nor was marginalization triggered by "thieving" kin networks and the increased supervisory role of the foreman. If the brothers ended up excluded from shopfloor solidarities, this was due to the fact that over 80% of the wage was now paid irrespective of the number of norms one could achieve. This provided neither a decent pay nor was it a disincentive to manipulating norms, bonuses or skill categories, but it did secure a stable income above and beyond one's personal effort at the point of production. It was only against the background of a stable income for all that old craft masters of Lupu's stature could finally be sidelined.

5.4 The Ends of Austerity

While the trajectory of workers' control, the vagaries of the piece-work wage system and the question of shopfloor solidarities and conflicts during the 1950s in Romania presents a scenario of sameness across East Central Europe, austerity reveals a stark contrast. One way of approaching this historical difference is to attempt to grasp comparatively the absence of any significant popular revolt among workers in Romania. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic or Poland, Romanian workers during the first half of the 1950s, although subjected to similar austerity policies and nearly identical rationalization drives, did not openly rebel, nor did they show any propensity to express their discontent collectively and engage in open claim-making. In his excellent historiographical essay on the "labor question" under state socialism in East Central Europe, Peter Heumos attributed this lack of protest to the lack of working class traditions and the political weakness of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party during the interwar epoch. This being the case, Heumos perceptively argued, historians of postwar Romania and Bulgaria are deprived of "an interpretative model that is widely used for obvious reasons by Czech, Polish, and Hungarian scholars", namely "the examination of the strategies used in conflicts between working class traditions and the demands of the new reality under communist dictatorship."⁷⁹ Being a product of socialist industrialization, therefore,

⁷⁹ Peter Heumos, "Workers under Communist Rule: Research in the Former Socialist Countries

the Romanian and Bulgarian working classes could not appeal to deeply engrained memories of militancy that, in specific circumstances, might have shifted their involvement from the private to the public sphere. Instead, the argument continued, historians might want to explore the figure of the “worker-peasant”, supposedly the classical subject of socialist industrialization in an overwhelmingly agrarian setting.⁸⁰

There is much to recommend in Heumos’s argument. Nonetheless, the evidence I have presented in this book largely questions this line of reasoning. To be sure, a certain notion of “tradition” did inform much of workers’ struggle during the food crisis of early 1947 in Reșița; just like remnants of social-democratic militancy (disparaged as “labor aristocracy” by communist party bosses) in the same town were indeed crucial for articulating workers’ demands during the same period. This case, however, was an exception. The rest of the labor unrest between 1945 and 1947, which I have examined in detail, emerged out of the dialectical process of party-making, the semantic scramble over the social meaning of “communism” and the prescriptions of the collective labor contracts. These conflicts had little to do with any previous historical experience and many were directed against social-democrat trade-union leaders. The fact that these conflicts did not occur after 1948 cannot simply be explained by the absence of working-class traditions and social-democracy, since at least in postwar Romania these had never been the sole causes of such conflicts. Could, then, the all-pervasive figure of the “worker-peasant” be held accountable for the quiescence of the 1950s?

Indeed, the majority of workers who entered industrial jobs during this period were residents of the rural hinterland, owners of small plots of land whose households were in principle more autonomous than those of urban workers because they were less dependent on wages. According to anthropologist John Cole, this household autonomy was maintained through the “second shift”, that is to say through work performed by the worker-peasant “after hours”, a fact that was largely welcomed by the authorities because it allowed them to pursue a politics of “low remuneration and high investments”.⁸¹ While Cole was making this argument for the 1970s, we can clearly see the process already un-

of Eastern-Central and South-Eastern Europe and in the Federal Republic of Germany”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 55, 2010, 102.

⁸⁰ On the worker-peasant in postwar Bulgaria, and the larger issues of rural-urban migration and proletarianization, see Ulf Brunnbauer, “*Die sozialistische Lebensweise*”. *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien (1944–1989)*, (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 221–277.

⁸¹ John W. Cole, “Family, Farm, and Factory: Rural Workers in Contemporary Romania”, in Daniel N. Nelson (ed.) *Romania in the 1980s* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 95.

folding during the postwar period, not merely in Romania but also in Hungary. According to Mark Pittaway, the double dwellers (*kétlaki*) were loathed and admired at the same time for their ability to retain a certain distance from the combined burden of price and wage fluctuation. Having a more or less autonomous household was an ideal to which many urban workers aspired, notably during periods of shortage when consumer items went missing or became pricy.⁸² That a more self-sufficient household better mitigated austerity is a sensible suggestion. It was also what Romanian communist party bosses banked on when they decided to keep wages low during the First Five Year Plan and campaigned for local administrations to organize vegetable gardens around factories, excluding from the distribution of ration cards those employees that owned property in the countryside.

Conversely, this policy was believed to encourage urban workers to seek employment: the promise of access to rationed goods and an industrial wage for town residents without any other source of income was supposed to function as an incentive, one confirmed by a survey conducted on 1,500 urban working-class families which revealed that between 1948 and 1950, household income in addition to the earnings of the head of the family went up from 5% to 14%, showing a modest but steady trend of working class women entering employment.⁸³ Moreover, the trend applied to the urban residents that could only benefit from type E ration cards, the lowest form of entitlement reserved for the unemployed and for those with no legal income. The number of type E cards decreased drastically between 1947 and 1949 from around 1,798,000 to under 100,000 as more and more urban residents took up jobs in industry, retail or administration. This evolution indicates that before the onset of the First Five Year Plan, the great bulk of new employees came from the urban environment rather than the countryside. By contrast, worker-peasants flocked to industry between 1949 and 1951, when the number of total employees went up from 1,700,000 to 2,400,000 while the number of ration cards remained constant, suggesting the newcomers were predominantly plot owners.⁸⁴ Household autonomy, therefore, was a governmental program that could work both ways: on the one hand, it could push urban residents to the ranks of the fully employed, discouraging them from eking out a living on type E ration cards or relying exclusively on

⁸² Mark Pittaway, "Retreat from Collective Protest: Household, Gender, Work and Popular Opposition in Stalinist Hungary" in Jan Kok (ed.) *Rebellious Families. Household Strategies and Collective Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 199 – 230.

⁸³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 33/1950, p. 8.

⁸⁴ ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 9/1951, pp. 50 – 90.

the salary of the male bread winner; on the other hand, it opened up industrial employment to the rural population seeking to supplement their meager existence with a factory job. More importantly, however, the promise of household autonomy justified the authorities' politics of low wages.

We can get a sense of just how low the low wages were from a survey commissioned by the government in 1954. By that point in time, the total number of employees had risen to over 2,784,100, out of which 1,849,800 were classified as industrial workers, and 229,000 engineers in industry alone. For a family of three, a monthly household budget that could secure the bare minimum of survival was calculated at 784 lei. With the average minimal industrial wage set at 346 lei, the survey pointed out that 42% of workers earned below 300 lei/month, another 42% between 300 lei and 500 lei, 8% between 500 lei and 700 lei, and only 4.8% above 700 lei.⁸⁵ The survey did not explain how over 80% of workers, even with the likelihood of two family members being employed, could cover their bare existence from their wages, but did point out that their condition was critical. The situation was even more grim in view of the proposal to abolish the rationing system, effective from December 1954, which in principle made workers even more dependent on highly unstable peasant markets (*piețe țărănești*) given that doing away with rationing was followed up by a general increase in prices across the state retail sector.⁸⁶ A second survey conducted in the fall of 1956 – nearly two years after the end of rationing – showed a similar picture: well over half of the active workforce employed in industry earned below the minimum wage, which was now set at around 425/500 lei.⁸⁷ This increase was due to the so-called “ration card compensation” (*compensație de cartelă*) – a special allowance given to all former card holders in order to make up for the surge in retail prices following the abolition of rationing, which amounted up to 100 lei per employee. Unlike in 1954, this survey set the subsistence family budget at 1,450 lei/month, the doubling of the budget indicating a doubling of prices for basic consumer items.

The nominal increase of the average minimum wage over the course of two years tells us little about how working-class households survived on low wages. If anything, it is very likely that between 1954 and 1956 real wages stagnated,

⁸⁵ ANR, PCM, 441/1954, pp. 32–62.

⁸⁶ On the context (and logic) in which the rationing system was abolished see Marius Cazan, “Poziția Bucureștiului în anii aprovizionării raționalizate. Gestiunea resurselor alimentare în R.P.R. (1948–1954), *Studii și articole de istorie*, Vol. LXXXII, 2015, 58–59.

⁸⁷ In rounds of popular consultation held within factories during the spring of 1957, workers asked for the minimum wage to be set at 800 lei and the average one at 1,500 lei; ANR, PCM, 94/1957, p. 3.

with the “ration card compensation” unable to fully cover the surge in prices. For instance, an inquiry ordered by the Institute of Public Hygiene in 1956 pointed out that over 3.5 million persons representing low wage workers and their families had a 50% deficit of caloric intake of animal origin, consuming mostly vegetables.⁸⁸ Unsurprisingly, these impoverished households spent all their income on food, passing on clothes and footwear from one generation to the next, with the (mostly male) bread winner exclusively wearing the working clothes given away by the factory. It was very common for urban families to send their children away to live with relatives in the countryside for extended periods of time. Urban workers too were in the habit of moving back to the countryside, or back and forth between jobs, between town and village and even between various regions of the country in search of a cheaper life.

If by 1956 over half of the workforce earned below the average minimum wage, another group of workers came even cheaper. These were the so-called “worker-soldiers” (*ostași muncitori*), conscripted young men compelled to perform work for the entire duration of their stint in the army in those industries deemed to be suffering from a shortage of workers, notably mining and construction, and paid with a symbolic monthly allowance. The working soldier was imagined as an in-between figure – cheap labor recruited from the ranks of the peasantry, the soldier would ideally acquire his skills through temporary forced work rather than by way of vocational training only to finally settle in rapidly industrializing regions. An early 1951 report on the Jiu Valley and Banat mining regions is indicative of this type of project. The soldiers, it was noted, were the best solution to the problem of enormous labor fluctuation. The mining companies, therefore, were advised to subsidize their lodgment, build housing facilities and encourage them to sign five-year long work contracts after their release. This would have allowed soldiers to bring in their families and organize their lives around the mines.⁸⁹ Archival evidence, however, suggests that that the project of stabilization was stillborn. It was perhaps soldiers’ temporary status that made the mining company turn a blind eye to their living conditions.⁹⁰ It is also not clear how much the soldiers could learn from the more experienced miners since the “ratty and barefooted” young men were constantly ridiculed by foremen.⁹¹ Within the piecework system, it did not pay off to have poorly equipped and unskilled soldiers in your work unit⁹²; while offering bonuses to

⁸⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 139/1956, Vol. II, p. 165.

⁸⁹ ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 20/1951, 5–6.

⁹⁰ ANCS, Trustul Minier Banatul-Anina, 85/1952, p. 292.

⁹¹ IBIDEM, 52/1952, p. 9.

⁹² IBIDEM, 2/1953, p. 3.

those military officers that could make the soldiers more committed proved futile.⁹³ The management of the mines would therefore end up arranging for the soldiers to travel back home in exchange for various goods.⁹⁴ By 1955, party leaders' disappointment over this policy became clear. In no more than five years, the percentage of forced military labor in the mining regions rose from 20% to 75%. This led not only to a great amount of discontent among the soldiers, it also contributed to a significant decrease in labor productivity. As a report issued by *Serviciul Muncii* – the state agency that controlled the military labor system – put it “due to the existence of this cheap labor, the mining equipment is not used to its full capacity”.⁹⁵ In addition, mining companies, far from trying to stabilize the soldiers, actually ended up completely relying on them and disregarded any efforts to further recruit new civilian workers.⁹⁶ The report concluded that forced military labor, no matter how well intended, was in fact obstructing the normal development of the national economy.⁹⁷

Much like forced military work in mining, by late 1956, the politics of low wages came to be perceived as an obstacle to boosting productivity and implementing the rationalization drive. Ferreting out “inner reserves” with conscripted soldiers and undernourished workers earning less than 400 lei per month proved impossible for a number of reasons. First and foremost, low wages exploded local labor markets, with workers switching jobs in search of not merely of a cheaper life but also better working conditions, housing, and overall better prospects for moving up the skill ladder. From the management's point of view, this effervescence of job switching was detrimental to production, caused “labor shortages” and kept workers unskilled, always on the move and with no proper incentive to stay put for a longer period of time during which they could acquire skills. Secondly, low wages were blamed for perverting the piece-rate wage system. On the one hand, low wages polarized the workforce into a privileged skilled and senior minority who could yield enough mastery over the labor process to earn more and bargain with management over “overblown norms” and a

⁹³ IBIDEM, 32/1950, p. 1.

⁹⁴ IBIDEM, 90/1952, p. 12.

⁹⁵ ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 10/1955 p. 5.

⁹⁶ In the first half of 1953 nearly 7,000 workers abandoned the Jiu Valley mines; ANR, PCM, 268/1953, p. 242.

⁹⁷ Between January and September 1957, the number of worker-soldiers in the Jiu Valley dropped from 17,500 to 5,700, ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 13/1957, p. 79. It should be noted here that Romania's use of forced military labor already scandalized the Soviet leadership in Moscow. During a visit to Kremlin in January 1954, Romanian communist party bosses were criticized by Anastas Mikoyan for employing over 100,000 soldiers on construction sites, not on ethical grounds but due to their low productivity, ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 153/1954, p. 11.

steady flow of raw materials. On the other hand, the vast majority of the workers that could access neither the management nor their own skill set on the shop floor, found it impossible to fulfil their norms and had to limit themselves to taking home the meager tariff wages. In both cases, the introduction of new norms with the help of the norm setter's stopwatch was unfeasible: the tightening up of "overblown norms" was met with resistance by the minority of workers backed by management; the modification of standard norms was met with indifference by the majority of workers. Small wonder that when a group of engineers of the country's leading industrial plants was invited to Bucharest to discuss the wage reform of 1957 with governmental authorities, their opinions converged on a single proposal: higher wages for all.⁹⁸

While austerity frustrated the process of rationalization, it also blocked the possibility of workers' protest. Unlike Czechoslovakian or East German workers, the vast majority of Romanian workers during the 1950s simply did not have enough money to bear the brunt of the combined fluctuation of prices in the state retail sector and peasant markets. Those who were affected represented the tiny minority of higher income workers, the likes of Stubnya, Căpuțan, arguably the Ancelovici brothers and Hofman, many of whom used the rationing system to acquire durable goods and clothing items and the peasant market to secure additional food. Or to put it differently, the over 80% of the workforce eking out a living on the tariff wage alone or slightly over the tariff wage was not yet composed of dependent consumers. Furthermore, for a country such as Romania, that relied on the export of raw materials, grain and foodstuff throughout the 1950s, it was the peasant rather than the worker who accumulated reserves of cash money. Unsurprisingly, a report issued by the International Labor Organization in 1959 pointed out that of all the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, Romania was the only one in which agricultural and forestry employment grew during the first half of the 1950s, arguably to service the export of timber and grain. (Table 3)

⁹⁸ ANR, PCM, 465/1957, p. 4.

Table 3: Working Population in certain East European countries, 1950–1955 (in thousands);
Source: ILO, Report of the Director-General. Part I: Current Problems and Trends (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1959), p. 46.

Country	Agriculture and Forestry		Outside Agriculture	
	1950	1955	1950	1955
Albania	570	554	88	188
Bulgaria	3,176	2,992	840	1,171
Hungary	2,082	1,991	2,143	2,512
Poland	7,090	7,000	5,314	6,400
Romania	6,040	6,350	2,177	2,853

In this context, the low-income workers fell back on subsistence, piecing together the autonomy of their households by appealing to kinship networks to raise children, handing down trousers and boots through generations and treasuring the taste of meat, eggs and milk on festive occasions. For the formerly unemployed urban population, this meant a return to a standard of living comparable if not higher than that which they had endured on the ration cards; for the “worker-peasant” it meant higher self-sufficiency and possibly an incentive to look for another job. Neither of these two types of workers, who filled the ranks of the working-class during the 1950s, experienced the abolition of rationing and the price upswings that followed it as a significant collapse of their livelihood routines. Nor were they particularly troubled by the admittedly failed attempts to tighten work norms.

By contrast, the double pressure of rationalization and austerity in Czechoslovakia and the GDR prepared the ground for major upheavals. The workers’ unrest that took place in early June 1953 in the industrial city of Plzeň was precipitated by the currency reform and the abolition of the dual system of rationing and market prices, with the consequence of doubling retail prices almost overnight.⁹⁹ Coupled with Czechoslovakia’s status as a food importer in which the urban rather than rural population held reserves of cash, this sudden surge in prices hit predominantly working-class constituencies.¹⁰⁰ A similar treadmill of factors contributed to the unleashing of the more famous June uprising in the

⁹⁹ I draw here on Kevin McDermott, “Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2010, 287–307.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Ames, “Soviet Bloc Currency Conversions”, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1954, 342.

GDR. There, an increased pressure to inject performance into the piece-rate system merged with the state's expenditure on the military, tax and price rises and the rolling back of welfare to channel popular discontent, all against the background of plummeting living standards "for much of the population."¹⁰¹ Taking to the streets, East German workers called for the old piece-rate system to be restored and for the price of non-rationed goods sold through so-called HO stores to be lowered.¹⁰² Granted, other factors were at play in both cases: it certainly did matter that Plzeň had been a bastion of social-democracy before the war or that the regional organization of the communist party showed signs of weakness, notably within the Škoda plant¹⁰³; and it certainly did matter that workers in Berlin, Leipzig, Halle or Görlitz could draw on a repertoire of shopfloor organization that included the election of strike committees and the march towards the center of the town.¹⁰⁴ Yet none of these components for a successful uprising, which might be grouped together under the banner of "tradition" triggered the protests, even if they did help them unfold and amplify. The relative social tranquility of Romanian workers during the better half of the 1950s, no matter how deprived they were of such "traditions", had structural rather than cultural origins. The politics of low wages and the dynamics of Romania's exports up until 1957 made both rationalization and austerity more amenable to be suffered in silence. Paradoxically, then, low wages secured the regime's legitimacy.¹⁰⁵

What motivated the general wage reform of 1957 was not the authorities' fear of a possible confrontation with the workers but rather the belated acknowledgement that low wages equaled low productivity. The reform introduced an indirect wage raise that came in two steps: first through the added monetary value of the "ration card compensation", effective since 1955, and second through the raising of the tariff wage to over 80% of the total wage, a figure that stabilized by late 1957.¹⁰⁶ By increasing the availability of money for working-class households,

101 Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945–1989* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17.

102 The best analysis remains Jörg Roesler, "'Akkord ist Mord, Normenerhöhung ist das Gleiche': Eine Tradition des Ökonomischen Kampfes der Deutschen Arbeiterklasse unter der 17. Juni 1953", *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, No. 2, 2004, 4–17.

103 Johann Smula, "The Party and the Proletariat: Škoda, 1948–53", *Cold War History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2006, 153–175.

104 Jonathan Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution", *German History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 630.

105 "Roughly speaking, legitimacy is sovereignty recollected in tranquility.", Ernest Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 24.

106 According to the estimate compiled by the personnel of Radio Free Europe, the average industrial wage increased by 24.7% between early 1957 and early 1959; "Romanian Decision on Wages, Pensions, Taxes and Prices: An Analysis", 25 July 1959. HU OSA 300–8–3–5374; Records

this general wage raise brought back the danger of an impending inflationary spiral. In the absence of rationing and as long as the government continued to pursue its policy of exporting raw materials and foodstuff, workers' new money would begin to chase fewer and fewer goods, pushing prices up. This danger was made concrete by the bad harvest of 1956 and by the state's decision to abolish the system of compulsory deliveries in late 1956, thus giving the peasants more room to maneuver so that they could engage in "free exchange" (*liber schimb*), including more leeway for negotiating prices for their produce.¹⁰⁷

The first solution considered to avert the impending inflation was a change in the balance between exports and imports. A significant reduction in the import of semi-fabricates coupled with a halt on construction work would have eased the burden of exporting foodstuff (notably meat and grain) and free raw materials such as timber for private domestic consumption. Moreover, if duly implemented this policy would have cut down the number of workers employed on construction sites who, once returned to the countryside, would have helped shrink the size of the general wage fund by exiting regular employment.¹⁰⁸ The second solution was the reversal of the "ration card compensation" policy. By 1957, this special allowance was effectively integrated into the tariff wage making it available for the entirety of workers, including fresh recruits into industry who did not hold ration cards before 1954. This proposal was quickly rejected even though some policy experts still denounced the allowance for violating the principle of socialism and for promoting a form of wage "egalitarianism".¹⁰⁹ The third and final solution was arguably more shocking than the first two since it involved a drastic rollback of welfare for the employed population: because workers came to earn more through the wage raise they should pay out of their own pocket for at least three public services subsidized from the state budget: kindergartens, meals at the factory canteen and medical assistance.¹¹⁰

of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

107 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 139/1956, Vol. I, p. 174.

108 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 123/1956, pp. 16–20. It is important to note in this context that communist party bosses looked forward to another mass lay-off campaign similar to the one pursued in mid-1947 in order to reduce the general wage fund, but were not convinced the Labor Code would allow it since it contained no article on firing workers; see the discussion in ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 3/1957, pp. 27–40.

109 For the entire debate see ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 5/1957, pp. 3–33.

110 In addition, beginning with 1955 workers were made to pay half of the price of the working clothes distributed to them by their employers; ANR, PCM, 59/1967, p. 28.

Unsurprisingly, by 1959, state spending on day-cares was modest. Out of the 330,000 children living in urban localities, the day-care system took in a mere 4%, with the parents' personal monetary input calculated at between 6.7% and 8% of the total amount of money spent yearly on a single child. This low figure was explained by the fact that the majority of day-cares were linked to factories, their services made available only to their employees and their provisioning dependent on factory resources and managerial will. This system created "inequality of treatment between children", privileging some workers at the expense of other less fortunate to work for a factory large enough to support its own day-care.¹¹¹ The proposal suggested not only an increase in the parents' participation to financing the facilities, but also the decoupling of day-cares from factories and their consequent opening up to all the residents in a given area rather than to specific groups of employees.¹¹² This transformation would have unburdened the factories from wasting their resources, while at the same time externalizing the cost of running the facilities to a larger pool of citizens. The same logic informed the decision taken in 1959 to abolish state subsidies for the meals at the canteen. By that point in time, 2,400 factory canteens across the country serviced a population of 550,000 employees, roughly 18% of the entire workforce, all of whom were paying around 56% of the cost of a single meal. Forcing half a million employees to cover the full cost of the meals would have put an end to the "indirect and unjustified enhancement of their income", an infringement on the "law of distribution according to the quantity and quality of their work."¹¹³ Finally, a policy paper estimated that in 1958, the Romanian state offered free medical assistance to 40% of its population, over 7 million employees, pensioners and their family members. The paper argued, on logistical rather than political grounds, against a previous proposal to integrate the spending on medical care in the workers' wage, giving them an extra monthly allowance in view of having them pay in cash for whatever services they might need in the hospital. The operation was judged too complex and counterintuitive: "even if the employee would not spend that sum of money on something else thus sav-

111 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 27/1959, Vol. II, p. 230.

112 The transition from predominantly factory based child care facilities to territorial/residential ones is characteristic of the 1950s across Eastern Europe. For the Hungarian case, see Éva Bicskei, "Our Greatest Treasure, the Child": The Politics of Child Care in Hungary, 1945–1956", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2006, 165–170.

113 ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 27/1959, Vol. II, p. 243.

ing it for the future, the amount of money would still be too little and could not cover the full medical treatment”.¹¹⁴

Few of these solutions were actually implemented. Yet all of them were seriously considered as ways of managing the allegedly negative consequences of abandoning the politics of low wages. Taken together, they reveal the conundrum the regime faced in its relentless pursuit of higher productivity: giving up on austerity and potentially on the social tranquility that it had nourished for much of the 1950s, only to face inflation, contemplate another round of mass lay-offs, cut down on welfare, and bring both export driven industrialization and the emergent construction boom to a halt, all for the sake of a firmer grip on the labor process and the possibility of rationalizing production.



Image 12: *Workers repairing a motorbike, Bucharest, mid-1960s; Source: Author's Personal Archive*

114 ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 21/1958, p. 73.

Table 4: Distribution of Wages by Groups of Employees in the State Sector (percentage). Source: Andreas C. Tsantis and Roy Pepper (eds.) *Romania. The Industrialization of an Agrarian Economy under Socialist Planning*. Report of a Mission sent to Romania by the World Bank (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1979) p. 180.

Wages of group (lei)	1960	1965	1970	1975
less than 900	65.4	39.6	7	...
901 – 1,100	16	23.1	20.3	...
1,101 – 1,300	8.9	14.2	22.2	3.5
1,301 – 1,500	4.7	9.2	15.7	16.8
1,501 – 2,000	3.9	10.1	20.8	44.6
2,001 – 2,500	0.8	2.6	8.2	25.8
more than 2,500	0.3	1.2	6	9.3

This panoply of possible policies and unlikely decisions voiced in the aftermath of the 1957 wage reform confirmed the soundness of the autonomy of the household strategy for keeping the costs of labor in check to the communist party bosses. As communist economists argued, the take-off of industrialization during the 1960s would have to take the form of “developed industrial zones” (*zone industriale dezvoltate*), assemblages of smaller industrial towns clustered around larger urban centers.¹¹⁵ In these so-called zones, the working class would retain its rural foothold without being occupied in agriculture, hence able to combine wages and self-subsistence. By the 1970s, the landscape had changed radically, as one foreign visitor perceptively noted not without an air of dismay:

It is difficult to get away from smoke, noise, and roads crowded with dusty trucks and buses. All towns, even small ones, are in the midst of this industrial boom, and some of the most beautiful low mountain valleys of Romania are now filthy with smog. The society emerging from this transformation is primarily one of small industrial towns. Even in the larger cities, with a few exceptions, the rows of factories and colorless new apartments create a distinctive, provincial atmosphere that resembles neither the cultured and affluent best of European urban life nor the worst of the crowded and desperate slums which are common in the poorer countries of the world.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Mircea Biji, Vladimir Trebici et alii., “Resursele de muncă și utilizarea lor în economia națională”, in *Dezvoltarea economică a României, 1944–1964* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1964), 194.

¹¹⁶ Daniel Chirot, “Social Change in Communist Romania”, *Social Forces*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 1978, 475.

Two decades after the end of the Second World War, Romanian socialism was being built, haltingly, in-between the cracks of the rich and the poor countries of the globe; its population half sheltered from global capitalism; its economy increasingly thirstier for top-notch technology, foreign credit, and know-how. Equally important, a World Bank report published in 1979 noted how between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s, the high wage dispersion that characterized the postwar epoch was drastically reduced.¹¹⁷ (Table 4) Indeed, the Romanian society of the 1970s might have been one of “small industrial towns” and “colorless new apartments” but it was also a society populated, for the first time in its history, not just by workers, peasants and intellectuals but also by potential mass consumers.

117 Andreas C. Tsantis and Roy Pepper (eds.) *Romania. The Industrialization of an Agrarian Economy under Socialist Planning. Report of a Mission sent to Romania by the World Bank* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1979), 179–181.

Epilogue

Commissioned by the British government during the early 1940s to formulate strategies for the postwar reconstruction and long-term development of the East and Southeast European backward countries, future World Bank policy-maker and founding father of “development economics”, Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, came up with two solutions. In a number of seminal texts published during the latter stages of the Second World War, Rosenstein-Rodan articulated two distinct paths of economic growth. The first one, which he favored, was for “depressed” countries of the region to undertake industrialization by borrowing capital. Western governments and international lending organizations would supply the region with sufficient investment funds to allow them to develop “with a smaller sacrifice of the standard of living” and preserve all the “advantages of an international division of labor [that] would, in the end, produce more wealth for everybody.”¹

The second option, which Rosenstein-Rodan categorically rejected, amounted to industrialization in circumstances of self-sufficiency. This was a solution that would imply “the construction of all stages of industry, heavy industry, machine industry, as well as light industry, with the final result of a national economy built like a vertical concern.”² The drawback of this development strategy was not merely economic but also political. Without international investments, capital had to be generated domestically through forced savings and severe cuts in the population’s consumption needs.³ Politically, this strategy required the state to be able to enforce discipline and ask its own citizens, to make a sacrifice collectively, which Rosenstein-Rodan considered “unnecessary”.

Such ideas quickly caught the imagination of policy-makers across Eastern Europe, particularly after the war ended and Soviet hegemony over the region became a matter of everyday life. For example, a plan for postwar reconstruction and long-term development that circulated within the Romanian Ministry of Finance in 1946 called for a thorough compression of private consumption, which needed to be driven back to “total self-restraint” (*sobrietate totală*) in

1 Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, “The International Development of Economically Backward Areas”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1944, 159.

2 Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, “Problems of Industrialization of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe”, *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 210/211, 1943, 203.

3 For a similar set of ideas about the reconstruction and development of Eastern and Southeastern Europe after the war, see Kurt Mandelbaum, *The Industrialization of Backward Areas* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1945).

order to allow for the state to accumulate all “surplus income above bare necessity” (*surplusul de venituri peste strictul necesar*) and reinvest it in capital goods: “the socialization of industry appears as the only political solution to determine one or more generations to make up for the lost time (*să recupereze timpul pierdut*) by giving up a substantial share of the product of their own labor to the benefit of the state and of future generations.”⁴ Repressing private consumption for the sake of accumulating “national capital” was one of the strategies for postwar reconstruction and development adopted by the leaders of the Romanian communist party after 1947. And it was a successful one.

Not only was there no major social upheaval during the 1950s, but the economy took off spectacularly. Between 1948 and 1958, the national output of iron ore increased sixfold, steel and cast iron quadrupled and the production of laminated finished goods tripled.⁵ By the end of the decade, resources had finally started to accumulate. Experts from Radio Free Europe closely monitoring the country’s economy concluded in one of their “background reports” for 1959 that “in contacts with Western economists and journalists, regime officials let it be understood that the industrialization of the country now pays dividends after a ten-year austerity program.”⁶ In an interview for the *Washington Post* the same year, party boss Chivu Stoica spoke for the government when he announced that at last “we are able to pay in dollars.”⁷ Hard won dollars during the 1950s allowed the government to look beyond the Soviet Union and COMECON countries as providers of technology. Indeed, the construction of Romania’s first “socialist” steel mill in the port city of Galați on the Danube could be considered a transnational project in industrial development, with Austrian, Italian, British and French companies competing to supply the licenses needed to operate oxygen steel making processes and ship the complex industrial equipment required.

Romania’s thirst for Western technology was not just the consequence of its domestic success in economic growth during the 1950s. It was derived in equal measure from its contentious relationship with the Soviet Union. During a meeting that took place in January 1954 in Moscow, a Romanian delegation headed by General Secretary Gheorghiu-Dej tried to negotiate for a line of credit that

⁴ ANR, Ministerul de Finanțe, 479/1946, pp. 53–54.

⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 185/1959, pp. 1–8.

⁶ “Romanian Decision on Wages, Pensions, Taxes and Prices: An Analysis”, 25 July 1959. HU OSA 300–8–3–5374; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁷ IBIDEM.

would finance the construction of a steel mill and a truck manufacturing factory. It fell to Anastas Mikoyan to crush the Romanians' hopes: "It seems that Romania understood to build up an oversized industrial base which far surpasses its domestic needs, but this is an illness of growth (*boală de creștere*) that can be noticed in other popular democracies."⁸ Mikoyan went on to dismiss the plan of erecting a steel plant as "not very rational", and qualified as "unnecessary" the construction of the truck manufacturing facility. Instead, Mikoyan argued, Romanians should import quality trucks from Czechoslovakia and bank on their comparative advantage, thereby recovering the country's ability to "export again foodstuff to Czechoslovakia, East Germany and even England, but not on the basis of compressing the consumption of the entire population, but rather through increasing agricultural productivity."⁹

What, then, might explain the remarkable commitment of Romanian communists during the 1950s to repress private consumption and accumulate capital against the Kremlin's advice? In the last part of this book, I offer two related explanations. First, I claim that the low standard of living that followed the end of the Second World War allowed for the payment of low wages for much of the 1950s. Second, I argue that while low wage policies had their limits in the manner in which they significantly hindered efforts to rationalize production in search of higher productivity, they were successful in securing Romania's economic breakthrough after 1949 against a background of industrial peace. Low wages might indeed account for the way in which capital was domestically generated throughout the 1950s, yet it does not account for the population's apparent willingness to sacrifice itself for the sake of reconstruction and development. To explain this collective sacrifice, I propose the notion of the "politics of productivity" as a general framework for interpreting the postwar epoch in Romania and more broadly, in Eastern Europe. I argue that the social consequences of the Second World War were mastered and overcome through a comprehensive, if contradictory set of policies and plans undertaken by the Romanian Communist Party, often on the advice of Soviet experts, to recover, consolidate, and boost the efficiency of industrial production.

Each chapter of this book focuses on one aspect of the politics of productivity. For the immediate postwar period, the politics of productivity entailed a country-wide campaign on the part of communist activists to pacify labor relations. This was easier said than done. Amidst wildcat strikes and everyday eruptions of physical violence, the communist party was not only supposed to con-

⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 153/1954.

⁹ IBIDEM.



Image 13: *Inaugurating locomotive no. 1000, Reșița*; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 194/1955

tain workers' grassroots radicalism but also to grow in numbers, appeal to industrial workers and root itself in working-class constituencies. Beginning in 1947, the politics of productivity moved to matters of economic reform, aiming to recuperate the value of cash money for workers' households, remake the wage system and reorganize the logistics of consumption. I dub this process "monetarization", a precondition for recovering the efficiency of industrial production. The transition to state ownership of the "means of production" in the summer of 1948 raised the issue of managerial authority and questioned the distribution of power between party activists, union delegates and factory directors. In this context, cementing a hierarchical chain of command within the new nationalized factories was judged to be yet another key precondition for triggering economic growth. Finally, for the better half of the 1950s, the politics of productivity took the form of the dialectic between rationalization and austerity, between pol-

icies designed to squeeze the value of labor through intensified work rhythms and other “Soviet work methods” and policies bent on maintaining low labor costs through meagre wages for the majority of workers.



Image 14: Party boss Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (left) celebrating with Stakhanovite miners, June 1952; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 72/1952.

The politics of productivity, however, was not just a bundle of policies that secured the reconstruction of postwar Romania and laid the foundation for long-term development. It was also a political wager offered to a society whose future socialist citizens were to be classified according to their ability to “create capital” i.e. their individual dedication to the collective economic and political project – of accumulating “national capital”.¹⁰ Each of the processes that I have singled out required some degree of participation and it is hard to imagine that the pacification of labor relations, the monetarization of everyday life, the recovery of managerial authority, rationalization and austerity would have even been remotely possible without the tacit, seldom uttered consent of the multitude. In other words, the politics of productivity was a call to collective sacrifice addressed in terms of citizenship, deferred affluence and national sovereignty. Ro-

¹⁰ I borrow this insight from Susan Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment. The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 23.

manian workers reacted the best they could, yet none openly protested the accumulation of “national capital”, while most simply kept on laboring along.

Beginning with the 1960s, attempts to alter the wage system, rationalize the labor process, boost private and social consumption or expand welfare could no longer be justified by referencing the social consequences of the war that were to be overcome and even “building socialism” was no longer a valid justification. Instead, the rationalization used was the need for Romania to be competitive in the global market. Productivity remained a constant concern for industrial experts, party bosses and ministerial authorities, but its rationale was now different. A typical lecture on the need to increase labor productivity during the late 1960s would start with the following observation:

We have to understand that there is a general law of the market that controls production. Those who lag behind lose the competition which takes place in the global market (*piața mondială*) and are inevitably pushed aside. We have to fight to observe this law of the global market in order to be able to compete with anybody.¹¹

Romania’s ambition to overcome its secular status as importer of industrial equipment and exporter of raw materials and foodstuff ran considerable risk. In the short-term, as John Montias presciently noted, “the systematic policy of building plants on the basis of the latest world technology, no matter how capital-intensive it happens to be”¹² was pursued without much concern for providing industrial jobs to the vast mass of underemployed rural residents. Yet this was a price communist party bosses were willing to pay. More importantly, however, in the long-run, Romanian exports of semifabricates and industrial goods to the global markets, both inside and outside of the Soviet bloc, could potentially falter. “If worse comes to worst”, Montias predicted, “consumers may be denied a part of, or all, the increases in living standards that they have been promised. Additional agricultural produce might then be extracted from the economy and sold on the world market.”¹³ The failure to secure reliable outlets for Romanian exports, Montias concluded, might potentially push communist party bosses to reintroduce “austerity measures” and justify them through nationalism. Future studies on late state socialism in Romania should take Montias’s prophetic wisdom seriously and explore the social, economic and political consequences of the country’s growing integra-

¹¹ ANR, PCM, 16/1968, p. 5.

¹² John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 232.

¹³ IBIDEM, 186.

tion within the world economy, most notably the historical trajectory of class-formation under debt-financed development in the East European periphery.

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